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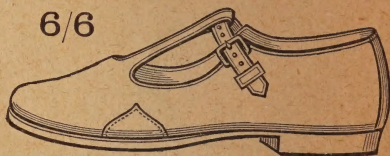
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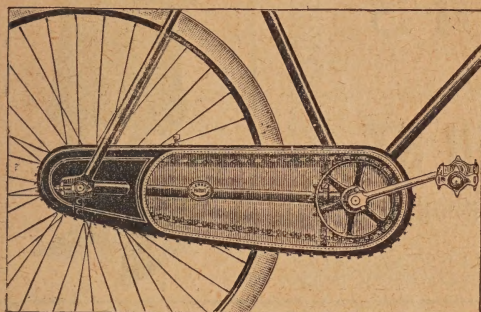
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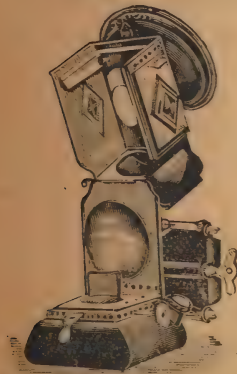
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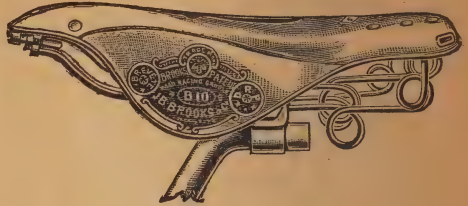
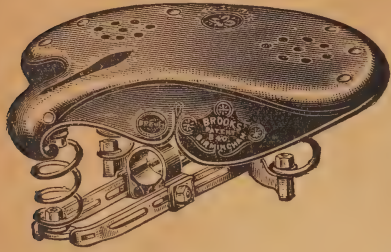


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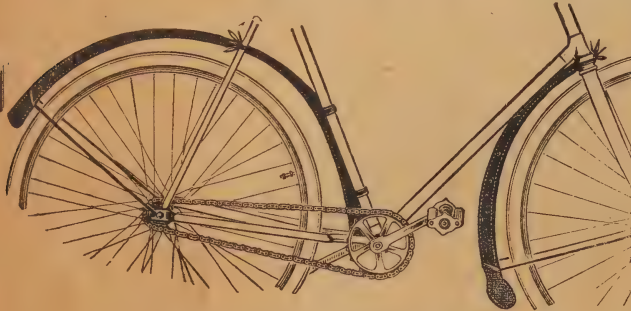
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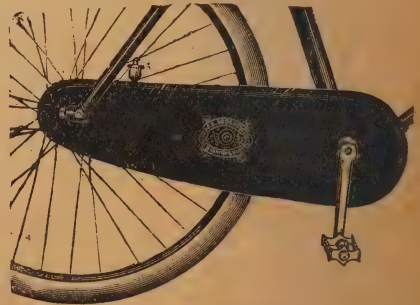
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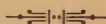
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Across Siberia on a Bicycle.

By Robert Louis Jefferson,

Author of "To Constantinople on a Bicycle;" "A wheel to
Moscow and Back;" etc., etc.



With Illustrations from original Photographs.



Published by
The Cycle Press, Limited,
108 Fleet St., London, E.C.

March 25, 1897

AMERICAN CRESCENT CYCLES



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James & Sons

This is a vintage advertisement for American Crescent Cycles. The central illustration depicts a woman in a light-colored, patterned blouse and a dark skirt, holding a bicycle upright with both hands. She is positioned in front of a large, glowing crescent moon. The bicycle has a diamond frame, large spoked wheels, and a chain drive. The text 'AMERICAN CRESCENT CYCLES' is prominently displayed at the top in a bold, stylized font. At the bottom, the address '63 NEW BOND ST. Corner of Brook St. LONDON W.' is written in a mix of bold and regular fonts. A small signature 'James & Sons' is visible in the lower-left corner of the illustration area. The entire advertisement is framed by a decorative, hand-drawn border.

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Robert Louis Jefferson.

..... PREFACE



THE title of this book is "Across Siberia on a Bicycle." I have been constrained to give it this title because I think it is the Siberian portion of my 6,574 miles bicycle ride from London to Irkutsk which is likely to be most interesting to the reader, but, at the same time, in order that the story of my ride shall be told with some consecutiveness, I have, in the brief space of five chapters, related the principal incidents and impressions of my ride across the European portion of the journey. In this preliminary canter to the stone rendered famous by the quotation: "Abandon Hope all ye who enter here," I have not attempted to spread myself, for more or less the country between London and Moscow is old ground, and much written of. Necessarily the first five chapters of this book form but a summary, bald and perhaps commonplace. I make this explanation in order that the reader may not be deceived upon opening the book into thinking that I have attempted to write up fully the whole journey from London to my destination. As a matter of fact I took few notes until I had passed into Asia, for it was Siberia I wanted to deal with, and it was Siberia I had interest in.

There is another point which I should like to make clear, and that is to disclaim posing as an authority upon Siberian matters. Travelling as I did I was naturally thrown much in contact with Siberian people and with the various Siberian tribes. I was able to observe, and my impressions, I believe, are tolerably clear, but, at the same time, my ignorance of the Russian language forbids me to claim that what I say should be taken as an authoritative statement upon the country. Most of my difficulties have been caused by my ignorance of the language and by my novel means of travelling, and therefore, in the narration of my adventures, I have endeavoured as far as I can to confine myself to my own experiences in a wonderful country, and to curb any desire to wander off into pages of abuse, advice, and criticism, which some few other writers, whose stay in Siberia has not been so long as my own have deemed it necessary to lay before English readers. One thing I will say, and that is that my opinion of Siberia is that it is not the hopelessly black hole which every English traveller who has previously written on the subject would have us believe.

R. L. JEFFERSON.

ENGLAND to SIBERIA.

**6,574 MILES ON A ROVER OVER THE
ROUGHEST ROADS IN THE WORLD.**

Extract of letter from...

R. L. JEFFERSON,
dated Irkutsk, Siberia,
August, 18th, 1896.

"I am sure you will be
glighted to know that yester-
y. I arrived in Irkutsk, and
mpleted my 6,574 miles ride
ross Europe and Asia. You
ill be more delighted to know
hat from start to finish my
Rover has gone through splen-
dly; not a break, not a flaw,
absolutely nothing has happened
to it all the way from London
to Irkutsk, and, as I write, it
stands beside me—a little bit
knocked about, enamel worn
off, and covered with Asiatic
dust and mud, but every bit as
good (and perhaps a little bit
better) as on the day it left its
Coventry workshop. You have
every reason to be proud of
that machine."



ROVER CYCLE CO., LTD.

(Late J. K. STARLEY & CO.)

COVENTRY.

ACROSS SIBERIA

ON A

.. BICYCLE ..



CHAPTER I.

FROM LONDON TO THE GERMAN FRONTIER.

"IT would be madness to attempt such a thing. A bicycle ride across Siberia is not to be thought of. You would be going to certain destruction. We might find someone to accompany you, or get you a Cossack guard, but even then the undertaking would be very very risky."

Such is a literal extract from a letter received from Moscow, while I was yet in the throes of making my preparations for the bicycle ride across Siberia. And not a very cheering extract either. Mr. Ludwig Block, of Moscow, the writer, was a man of authority, and to him I had looked for whatever information concerning Siberia it was possible to obtain, and though his letter, I must confess, somewhat damped my ardour, it did not shake my determination, for my reading had led me to think that to cross Siberia on a bicycle was a feat possible, though perhaps a feat dangerous.

So I kept right on with my preparations. My Rover bicycle constructed under my own supervision neared completion. I was already doing long daily spins in Kensington order to fit my muscles for my 6574 mile straightaway ride, and at the beginning of March, 1896, I felt fit for the task I had set myself.

The experience I had gained in several long continental journeys was of considerable service to me in the construction of my bicycle, and the selection of the luggage I should have with me. The machine for my ride was an ordinary light roadster Roadster with one or two special points about it in order to make it more suitable for Arctic roads. It scaled 35-lbs. without luggage, and 54 when loaded up. It was entirely grey, not an atom of silver or chrome was visible, for I wanted a serious machine rather than a gaudy one.

wheels were equal sized and fitted with the longest two inch Clincher tyres made by North British Rubber Company. A heavy chain enclosed in a Grose leather gear cover, and a Brook's spring saddle of augmented strength completed the special fittings of the bicycle, although I should not forget to mention that I stuck to my old spring gear of 56 inches, which, in twelve years hard cycling, I concluded was the best gear for long distance riding.

My luggage was an important consideration, and required the utmost ingenuity in order to cut it down to the lowest proportions, and at the same time not to sacrifice anything of necessity. I had myself invented a special luggage carrier, which was built over the back wheel, and thanks to Messrs. Lucas and Sons, the cycle accessory makers, I was able to make a careful selection of all the little odds and ends which would require on the journey. A complete spare set of Jaeger underclothing was in first consideration. A dozen muslin handkerchiefs, three bottles of Elliman's disinfectant, three tins of Bovril, a tin of kerosene lamp oil, a small flask of iodoform, a bottle of quinine, a small box containing various medical sundries, such as sticking plaster, lint, fever powders, maps, itineraries, paper, pen, ink, needles and cotton, toothbrush, soap, powder, soap, spare buttons, tape, etc. In the tool-bag attached to the handlebar, I carried two spare sets of nuts and bolts, cones, screws, balls, valves, and sections of chain for possible repairs; two pumps, two spanners, repairing material for the tyres, oil-can and lamp-wick. Strapped to the handlebar I carried one of Anderson's rubber boots, waterproof suits, and under my rubber jacket, around my waist, was the tool belt, containing my Smith and Wesson revolver, which had been my faithful companion on my wheel journeys to Constantinople and Moscow in previous years.

Thus equipped and fit, I waited impatiently for March 21st, the day appointed for the start. My friends of the Middlesex County Sports Club had promised to give me a send off in hearty English fashion, from the gates of their track at Wood Green; and J. Wilson ("Faed") one of England's best cyclists, doing the honours. For many days prior to the auspicious morning, when that villainous weather had been the

rule, and no one who cycled in any part of the London district on March 21st, will gainsay me in the statement that it was one of the worst days we have yet experienced in England. Leaden skies, and marshes on the roads! The outlook was certainly gloomy, especially in view of the fact that 72½ miles separated me from Harwich, whither I had hoped to wheel by 9 p.m., in order to catch the boat which was to convey me to Rotterdam. It was making the best of a bad job with a vengeance, but it was gratifying to find one's friends turning up in such numbers, and to receive from all hands the well wishes of some earnest followers of cycling sport.

It was from the middle of a particularly splashy road outside Wood Green track that I made the start—at 12-29 precisely. I shaped my way immediately for Enfield, alone, for the frightful state of the weather was prohibitive to cycling except by the muddiest of mudlarks. Even the passers by on the footpath gazed askance as I splashed and splurged through the ooze that lay tyre deep on the road—no doubt thinking me a madman to venture out in such weather.

At Enfield I found C. W. Brown, a noted London cyclist, and a lady companion, waiting on their tandem to pilot me across the wastes of Epping to Chipping Ongar. It was a frightful ride, the Essex roads ruling as some of the worst I have ever been on. Two of the hills were absolutely unrideable and it was much after the time I had set myself that we rolled into Ongar. C. W. Brown kindly consented to go as far as Chelmsford with me, and over roads which got worse rather than better, we careered on our unhappy way. Chelmsford was made at 5 o'clock, and here an hour's stay was made for tea, when I set out alone for Colchester.

Darkness came down black and heavy, which made the travelling exceedingly precarious in view of the state of the roads. The twenty-two miles separating Chelmsford from Colchester were covered in two hours and a half, and here it became obvious that to attempt to catch the boat would be fruitless, so I threw up the sponge with 51½ miles to the credit of my first day's ride, and sought comfort in the Fleece Hotel.

Sunday was a glorious day, but the roads were still gluey and bad. However, I was

able to reel off the 21 miles to Harwich in good time, and here I was overjoyed to find my good friend, E. H. Godbold, who had trained down the previous night to see me off. Harwich is decidedly not an exciting place, and Godbold eventually found it so. It was a case of lounging through the day until the boat started, and at 10 p.m. the "Amsterdam,"

one of the three magnificent new boats of the Great Eastern Railway, swung off from Parkston Quay, and the last I saw of England was the haze of the electric lights, and Godbold waving his cap.

A splendid journey to Rotterdam, the boat arriving half an hour in front of time. On the quay several members of the Dutch Cyclists' Union were waiting to receive me, including Messrs. Luning and Stokvis, who bore messages of welcome from Mr. Frans Netscher, the president of the International Cyclists' Association, and from other members of the Dutch wheel fraternity.

Rotterdam is one of the quaintest and most lovable places I have ever been in. It is Dutch without a shadow of a doubt, its innumerable canals, its broad-nosed barges, its irregular architecture; its bulky men, and

equally bulky women, Schiedam gin and Amstel lager, mild cheese and sausage. I had not much time to renew the pleasures of Rotterdam, setting out the next morning for Amsterdam, under a convoy of Dutch cyclists. The capital of Holland was reached in one day, passing over the bed of the drained sea of Haarlem, which was

then just beginning to put the spring bloom on its miles of tulip and other bulbous flowers.

I remained only one day in Amsterdam, that city of diamonds, narrow streets, fine houses, gay cafés, and happy people, and continued my journey across the flat brick roads of Northern Holland, toward the German frontier. Thanks to the kindness of the Dutch Cyclists' Union, I was rarely without cycling company, and each evening was the guest of some wheeling club. By way of Amersfoort, Deventer, and Delden, I kept up good progress in spite of rainy weather, and six days after leaving London,



Ploughing through Essex.

I passed between the black and white frontier posts, and wheeled into the Fatherland.

CHAPTER II.

ACROSS NORTH GERMANY.

BASELUNNE was the first town I touched at in Germany, and it was easy to see the difference that existed between the "Deutcher" and his equally Teutonic brother, the Hollander. A happy beer loving race seem the Germans, and it is pleasant for me to say that from end to end of the Kaiser's land I got on famously with all class of Germans, a fact contributed to, perhaps, by my fair knowledge of the German language.

From the frontier to Bremen is not a far cry, and a day and a half after leaving Holland I was wheeling through its old world streets seeking for an hotel. Bremen is a big town, as becoming one of the first German ports whence start the magnificent vessels of the North German Lloyd Company. Also, it is an old town, and the Rathhuis, or old Parliament building, is a model of antiquity, containing as it does some fine old paintings of the wars of long ago.

I had not been long in the town before I was discovered by several members of the local bicycle clubs. Mr. Arnold Papendieck, representing the Bremen Bicycle Club, was the first to call upon me, and following him came quite a multitude of the "radfahrers" of Bremen, so that a photograph was absolutely necessary.

I left early on the following morning, the weather being still bleak and rainy. I was accompanied as far as Ottersburg by several members of the Radfahrer Club Sport of Bremen. From Ottersburg I continued alone to a small village called Zeven. Next day Hamburg was my goal, and I arrived in the great German port soon after mid-day, just in time to escape a perfect deluge of rain, which, unfortunately, kept me in my hotel

until darkness had nearly fallen. Consequently I did not see much of Hamburg. My walk in the evening revealed a city strikingly like London, perfectly new so far as buildings are concerned, and with little of the German character about them. The streets are wide, badly paved, and almost invariably laid with tram-lines. The electric tram-car, in fact, is one of *the* institutions of Hamburg.

I had a rather bad time next day, getting on to the wrong road, and, consequently, suffering grievously from sand and stones.

Sandesneben was as far as I got, and next day, *via* Ratzburg and Gadesbush, I made Schwerin, the capital of Mecklenburg-Schwerin. Here I was met by quite half a hundred members of the Bicycle Club of Wismar, and a really jolly evening was spent. I was almost persuaded to go on to Wismar, but the thought that there was still a long distance to be pedalled ere I reached Irkutsk prevented me.

On Saturday the weather was beautiful, and I was able to rattle off the 110 kilomètres which separated me from Waren in good time. The route was through a most interesting lake country, resembling, indeed, our own lake district, with the exception that the lakes are of much larger extent. The hills are not big, but the glow of colour which permeates the downs and the water is something which I have never seen before.

Two days later I rode into Stettin, the first big town in Pomerania—which name reminded me forcibly that I was nearing the land of the Muscovite.

Stettin is a fine town, with broad, well-paved streets and handsome buildings. The weather being so bad next day I decided to

ACROSS NORTH GERMANY.

stay over until the following morning, and in the afternoon, in company with Mr. Dittmer and several other members of the Stettin Bicycle Club, went for a steamboat ride on the river—a very interesting trip, passing the great shipbuilding yards of the North German Lloyd Company, where by the way, the largest liner in the world was in course of building.

I made a little over fifty miles the next

From Koslin to Schlawe, Stolp, and Danzig, and then Danzig was only fifty miles away. Over an undulating road, and through an interesting country, I reached Karthaus at mid-day, on April 11th, and Danzig at four o'clock. Rain came down heavily in the afternoon, and the road into the town was inches deep in mud and water.

At Danzig I completed the first thousand miles of my ride. This had been done in



A send-off from Bremen.

day, reaching a small town called Plathe; weather and roads considerably better. There was cycling company all the way, in fact the Stettin cyclers were very good, telegraphing down the road to the various clubs to expect me. On the 9th of April I got to Koslin, now very near the coast of the Baltic Sea. Here the Koslin cyclists turned out in full strength, and such was the array that the procession through the streets was most imposing.

21 days, showing an average of close upon fifty miles a day, which, perhaps, will not be considered bad when the wretched weather is taken into consideration, while the roads were certainly not over grand. I was now in West Prussia, and there appeared to be a distinct change in the character of the people. The genial, burly, fair-haired Teuton was rarely seen, the people generally being of a saturnine aspect and exceedingly evil-looking. Bicycles did not seem to be

ACROSS SIBERIA ON A BICYCLE.

very numerous, consequently horses shied and dogs snarled and snapped. Some of these latter were really ferocious, and I found it necessary to load my revolver, a proceeding I had hoped to avoid until after crossing the Russian frontier.

To Mr. Kling, of the Danzig Bicycle Club, I was indebted for a very pleasant day spent in Danzig. Unfortunately the weather was simply shocking, but still, in the intervals between the downpours, I managed to see a good many sights in this fine old Prussian town, including the Rathhuis, or old Government building of the Stadt Danzig; and naturally the Rath's Keller, where are kept

myself to seeing the fine castle of the Prussian kings, where once resided the beautiful Queen Louise of Prussia. Owing to the bad weather I was kept two days in Königsberg, and on the day I left could only cover fifty kilometres, to Tapiau, a small town just before Tilsit, the last town before crossing the frontier into Russia.

On Saturday, April 18th, I left Tilsit in company with five members of the Tilsit B.C., who had obtained temporary passports in order to enable them to go with me as far as Tauroggen, the first Russian village. An hour's riding brought us in sight of the frontier, and here three mortal hours were



A view of Hamburg.

the finest German wines; a trip to sea in the afternoon to Fahrwasser, a celebrated Prussian watering-place; the exploration of a German battleship, the "Hagen," in Danzig harbour; and the evening with music in the Wilhelm Theatre. Danzig is an antique, sailor-man sort of place, quite different to anything I had yet seen in the land of the Kaiser.

Two days later I got to Königsberg, where I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Vogel, president of the Deutscher Radfahrer Bund, a gentleman enthusiastic on cycling and an eloquent speaker. The weather in Königsberg was simply frightful, and I confined

spent before I could pass into Holy Russia. My bags and person were searched and several papers confiscated. I had to pay twenty roubles for my machine, and after being badgered and questioned as to what I wanted I was finally let go. Russia may be all right, but its officials sadly lack polish.

My German friends, after a makeshift tea in a moujik's hut, after one or two glasses of Russian vodka and several bottles of bad beer, and after many well wishes and many enthusiastic shouts of "All Heil! All Heil!" returned to Tilsit at sundown, and left me to solace myself in the mud of Tauroggen. With their departure I felt for the first time



Among the German cyclists.

absolutely alone. Throughout the fatherland even if I had not met cyclists I always felt among friends, for, I must say, that whatever national prejudices there may be between

the two countries, individually the Englishman is welcome everywhere in the land of the Kaiser.

CHAPTER III.

TO THE KREMLIN CITY.

NO one, except he who has experienced it, can realise the tremendous difference which a frontier makes ; especially a frontier such as that which separates Germany from Russia. Here was I in Touroggan, a typical Russian small town ; buildings, people, everything speaking and smelling of Muscovy ; and only a few kilomètres away was a German town where Russian was practically unknown and where the Teuton naturally predominated. There was no hotel in the town, but I got a sofa-bed in a small *hostinitca* for 25 kopecks, or, in English money, 6½d. The food I got was sardines and black bread, and the drink was from the national Samovar, in glasses, and, of course, tea—with a nip of vodki to give it a relish.

It was an execrable road next day to Schawli, a larger town than Touroggan, where I found an hotel. The next day I proceeded to Mitau and the day after to Riga, being met halfway by Mr. Rosenberg and Mr. Lobenoff, of the Touring Club of Russia. We arrived at Riga early, and were soon amongst the cyclists of the town, good fellows all, mostly of German descent and full of enthusiasm for the wheel.

From the frontier to Riga the road had been execrable, a bit hilly in places and with the surface deep in mud ; villages few and far between, and nothing to relieve the monotony of the view but the inevitable Russian *telega*, or springless cart, and the equally inevitable moujik. The weather was very cold, and on parts of the roadside snow was piled deep, the winter having been rather severe in this part of the world.

Riga is a handsome city, one of the chief exporting points of Russia. The port is fine and the streets are broad, well paved, and

well lighted. In company with several cyclists I visited the principal sights, not the least of which is the club-house of the Riga cyclists in the King's garden. Here the cyclists have magnificent club rooms and a wooden track—four laps to the mile. There are two cycling clubs : one called the "First Riga Verein," with 250 members, including the British Consul, Mr. Woodhouse ; and the local establishment of the Touring Club de Russie, represented by about forty members.

I left Riga about nine in the morning of April 24th, in company with several cyclists. The roads were decent, and the weather fair, though cold. We had not proceeded far, however, before snow began to fall heavily. Half-way to Wenden, which was to be our destination for the night, we turned off the road to visit one of the ruined castles of Livland, and a very interesting place it was. At Wenden we had a royal reception from the cyclists there, who had been apprised of our coming.

The roads had now deteriorated woefully, the frost and snow, which had scarcely gone, having left them in a deplorable condition ; huge holes and ruts covered with a foot of slime was what I attempted to ride over for the next few days. I struggled on, however, and on April 30th I passed under the Moscow Gate and entered St. Petersburg.

At St. Petersburg I completed my second thousand miles, or a little over, making nearly one-third of the whole journey. It had been a trying ride through Russia ; my ignorance of the language being my greatest drawback. What adventures I had had, however, were not of a very startling character, the most serious perhaps being when a moujik, full to the brim with vodki, deliberately placed himself in my way and brought

me over.

From Riga to St. Petersburg the scenery is deadly uninteresting, except in the little portion of Livland; fir forests and swamps being the general perspective. Livland is part of the old Swedish possessions, annexed to Russia by Peter the Great. There are several ruined castles in the province, while the province altogether bears a far more civilised aspect than interior Russia. Once past Pskow and the sheepskin-clad moujik and the gaberdined Hebrew make their presence felt.

I spent two days in St. Petersburg, natur-

which I had been told is far finer than either the Champs Elysees or the Unter den Linden, is quite discounted by the mean character of some of the houses which border the way. The Winter Palace, the church of Kazan, and the Hermitage, are magnificent buildings, but the general architecture of the city is without order or beauty. My greatest delight in St. Petersburg was to take a fast drosky and go at a swinging bat down the Nevski. There is no such thing as furious driving in Russia, and drosky driving is an exciting pastime.

The following Sunday I left St. Petersburg,



At the Russian Frontier.

ally in sight-seeing, for the capital of Russia bears a big name as one of the show places of Europe. I must confess I was disappointed in St. Petersburg; possibly I expected too much, or I had not time to see it properly. At any rate, my estimation of it is that it ranks inferior to Moscow. In St. Petersburg we have a city with a bit of London, a bit of Paris, and a dash of Berlin; with Russian slovenliness and want of order to rob it of any beauty it might possess. The Neva is a fine river, spoiled by a miserable bridge of boats; and the famous Nevski Prospect,

quite fifty cyclists in company, the majority coming as far as the Moscow gates. I reached Luban at six o'clock, where a curious incident occurred in the hostinitca at which I put up. In the middle of the night there was a furious banging at my door. I got up and turned the key, when a couple of men, one with a lantern, pushed their way into my room. Holding the lantern up to my face they scrutinised my features closely, then gave vent to a disappointed "Neot! Neot!" ("No! No!") and left me without so much as "thank you." I locked the door again,

and a few minutes after heard a big row going on down stairs. I haven't the remotest idea who the men were or what they wanted, but such is life in Holy Russia.

I was now on the great *chaussee* which runs between St. Petersburg and Moscow, and which bears the reputation of being the finest road in Russia. The weather I experienced, however, was of the most miserable character, and for days I struggled on in a deluge of rain and over sodden roads.

On May 6th I endeavoured to get to Wischnij-Wolotschok, a large town halfway between the new and old capitals of Russia,

especially when I learned that Trofimenco was to accompany me the rest of the way to Moscow. We reached Wolotschok at 2 o'clock and made Tarshok by 11 p.m. Next day, May 9th, we reached Twer, and on the 10th Klin, now only fifty-five miles from Moscow. Between Klin and Moscow on May 11th we were met by several of the Moscow cyclists, including Mr. Ludwig Block and Mr. Orloff. I entered Moscow to find the city, which I visited last year, in the throes of extensive preparations for the Czar's coronation, which was to take place some week or so hence. Fifteen minutes after



Nearing Riga.

but a storm, terrific in character, prevented me doing more than 22 versts. From Waldai to Jedrowo, where I was obliged to throw up the sponge, the road was under water to a depth of more than a foot, the surrounding plain being quite inundated. Next day was much better, but the roads were villainous. Toiling slowly along, half-way to Wolotschok, I was startled by a shout, and, looking up, nearly fell off my machine with delight, for there was Trofimenco, who paced me so well on my Moscow ride in 1895, coming towards me. It was a joyful meeting, more

passing through the Arc de Triomphe I was comfortably ensconced in Mr. Block's house and welcomed right well.

I had now completed 2,500 miles of my ride, time 52 days exactly. I had not taken the shortest route to Moscow by any means, the detour to St. Petersburg making a difference of over 400 miles. From here I was to go into a part of Russia which was practically new ground to the European cyclist, into the Tartar provinces and so on to the Siberian steppes.

Looking back over my ride across Russia,

bar the frightful weather and detestable roads, my experiences were not nearly so harassing as they were in 1895, when I rode a bicycle to Moscow through Russian Poland. I cannot, however, put it on record that Russia is a cyclist's paradise. The Russians of the poorer class are not bad-hearted people, but they are miserably poor, filthily dirty, and their wooden houses such that a Yorkshire pig would turn up its snout at. Hotels, if such a name can be given to the hovels called *hostinitcas*, in some of the biggest towns are dirty and dear; in the villages the inns are terrible, a shakedown on the floor or on a wooden bench being all that one may expect. The eating is primitive,

eggs, milk, and black bread being my principal food between large towns. Meat it is almost impossible to get, and green vegetables never heard of, even in the big towns. Of the roads I cannot speak too strongly. True, I did not go over them at the best time, and my experiences were rough. Russian road-makers have a playful habit of cutting down small trees and scattering them over the road; this is the way they repair the surface. Other delightful aspects of cycling in Russia are runaway horses, yelping, snapping curs, stick and stone throwing urchins, and drunken moujiks sleeping off the effects of vodki in the middle of the road.



A street in Riga.

CHAPTER IV.

INTO THE TARTAR PROVINCES.

SEVERAL causes contributed to a rather prolonged stay in Moscow—long when compared with the short stoppages in other large cities. Firstly and chiefly, the weather! Since my arrival it rained incessantly—morning, noon, and night; the streets of Moscow were rivers of running water, through which the mud-spattered populace splashed and slipped their way along. Secondly, it was the season of the Czar's coronation, and, as coronations only come occasionally in a man's lifetime, I was prevailed upon by my friends to stay a few days longer in order to see a little of the preliminary stages of what must rank undoubtedly the sublimest spectacle of the nineteenth century. Thirdly, and of great importance, my preparations for the Asiatic portion of the ride were heavy. The disposal of my spare machine, which was to precede me stage by stage on the road—maps, telegrams, papers, *padorojnai*, passports, introductions, spare parts and other trifles which had to be attended to. Fourthly and lastly, the complete necessity of learning the rudiments of the Russian language.

On one day I attended a race meeting at the Moscow track, where there was some very spirited racing. The Moscow track is well constructed, the surface being of cement; three laps to the mile. The grand stand is a model structure; there are club rooms and a nice buffet attached. In fact, Muscovite cyclists are in no wise behind their more western compeers.

Sunday, May 24th, was the date fixed for my start eastward from Moscow. True to its character the weather was vile, rain falling in torrents when we arrived at the Octroi on the Nijni-Novgorod chaussée. Several cyclists were to accompany me, Mr. Blomerius as far as Vladimir, nearly half-way to Nijni. Among those who came to see me off were Mr. Orloff, Mr. Ludwig Block, and Mr. Golamzine, editor of the "Russian Cyclist."

We could only make fifty versts the first day, arriving at Bogarodosh drenched to the skin and smothered in mud. Here we were met by several local cyclists. On Monday the weather was better, and Mr. Blomerius and I covered 122 versts to Vladimir. On Tuesday I continued alone to Wjasniki, and on Wednesday got to Nijni-Novgorod, having covered the 300 miles from Moscow in four days. Fifty versts from Nijni Mr. Thomas Pollock and Mr. Henry Tate, two Englishmen resident in the town of the great fair, together with several Russian cyclists, were waiting for me, so that my impressions of the beautiful town on the mighty Volga were considerably enhanced by having Englishmen to speak with.

The road from Moscow to Nijni-Novgorod has the reputation of being one of the best in Russia. I can only say, however, that it is inferior to the worst road in England. Here and there there is some pretty good going, but, generally speaking, the road bed consists of a couple of huge ruts, grass-grown and deceitful; the horse path in the centre of the ruts is the best cycling way, but spoiled by the rubble of small stones which lie beneath the grass. The scenery is rather more interesting than that portion of Russia westward of Moscow, the plains being watered by several large streams, while the woodland is not so sombre as the fir forests, which are so typically Russian.

Half-way between Wjasniki and Nijni, while passing through a dense forest, I got my first glimpse of a wolf. It was a big grey affair, slinking along in the undergrowth by the side of the road. As soon as it heard the buzz of my wheels it disappeared among the trees. At the moment I saw it the last thing I was thinking about was wolves, and at first I did not realise that what I had seen was that terror of European travellers in Russia. I dismounted and fired a shot in the direction which the wolf had taken, but nothing happened; and I remounted and

continued my way.

I was greatly impressed with Nijni-Novgorod. Situated on the confluence of the Volga and the Oka it occupies a magnificent site. It is semi-oriental in character, and being on the edge of the Tartar provinces, those interesting people form some portions of the community. The town itself when I visited it was in the throes of excitement. The great Russian Exhibition, which had been in preparation for over two years, was on the eve of opening, and the great fair which takes place annually, loomed in the immediate future.

At Nijni one leaves Western civilization severely behind. In the first place, the great chaussée, or stoned road, which commences at the German frontier, ends here, and eastward the way of the traveller is over what is known as a land-way. This road, which I was soon to have some experience of, deserves description. In the first place it is not a made road at all; double rows of trees enclose a space about a hundred and fifty yards wide, and this is the road. The surface is the native grass, clay, or sand, principally the latter, and over this surface generations of tarantasses have executed some thousands of ruts, varying from two to three feet deep. The Russian yemshik, being of an independent turn of mind, scorns to follow in the track of a predecessor, and believing that he knows best where the road ought to be, drives in a different place to any one else. The perspective of the road, therefore, looks something like the railway track outside Paddington Station. There are at least two hundred deep ruts, which intersect each other, and not a foot width of surface upon which to ride a bicycle for even a hundred yards. Cycling on such a road as this is, therefore, a feat sufficient to test the most patient of patient men, and I must confess that when I saw the Kazan road for the first time I was filled with dismay and forebodings. I had mapped out my plans to reach Kazan (400 versts) in four days, but Mr. Pollock assured me it would be quite impossible to do it under eight or nine. It is a significant fact that I was the first cyclist to attempt to ride on this road, although there are cyclists in Kazan as well as in Nijni.

With such a prospect before me, I, therefore, did not set out with a very light heart. Mr. Pollock came with me for four versts in

his trotting sulky, and then bidding me God-speed and good luck left me to my own devices. I will not attempt a description of my first day's ride on the land-way. In the words of the gushing young reporter it "beggars description." At the end of six hours' fearful work, during which I rode bits, walked bits, carried the machine over streams, continually hopping on and off, I covered 28 miles, and night coming on I sought shelter in a moujik's hut.

The next day, in the same manner, I went at it for twelve hours, and managed thirty-two miles, making the village of Lyskovo. It rained all night, and when I started out in the morning I found the road-bed feet deep in clayey mud. It was not only impossible to ride, but impossible to walk; great chunks of clay stuck to the wheels, and lodging in the forks prevented the wheels from revolving. After a verst I was compelled to shoulder the machine and return to the village, realising that there I must abide until the surface dries.

The weather had now set in terribly hot, and swarms of mosquitoes had to be battled with. The swamps which border the Volga breed these blood-sucking insects by the billion. They settle on one's face and hands, puncture the skin, and then suck the blood until their bodies are quite full. There is not much pain, but their depredations raise little lumps all over the face and hands.

Lyskovo was decidedly not a lively place to spend a day in, and I was very glad when next morning broke to find the sun shining brightly and a stiff wind blowing from the west. I reconnoitred the road, and found dry running at the sides, so set off as early as possible in the best spirits. A hard day's work found me at Wasil-Sursk in the evening, having accomplished 42 miles. For the next three days beautiful but very hot weather prevailed, and on June 5th I reached Kazan, having been seven days in covering 325 miles—seven days' hard labour such as I have never before experienced. I arrived in Kazan barely in time, for while crossing the Volga in an open boat a storm came on with terrific fury, and I had to complete the last few miles into the Tartar city drenched to the skin.

The country between Nijni-Novgorod and Kazan is very interesting; in fact, it is quite unlike the typical Russian scenery which obtains further west and east. The road

runs almost parallel, but very tortuously, with the Volga, which is here shored by quite respectable hills. There is not much level running: it is up and down all the way, and if the surface had not been so treacherous I am sure I should have fully enjoyed some of the magnificent views which characterise the valley of the Volga at this point. Towns and villages, too, changed in their appearance. Most of the inhabitants of this part of the country are Cherimesens and Tartars, principally the former. Many of them do not speak Russian, and thus my difficulties were added to. The Cherimesens are a strange, wild lot, with nearly black complexions, and obviously with a tinge of African blood among them—to judge by the woolly hair of the men. The costume they

and woman were driving towards me, and the spirited little horse, taking fright at my machine, bolted headlong. The woman was pitched out of the cart on to her head, and was stunned, but the man managed to keep his seat until the horse was, with a tremendous crash, brought up against a tree, and the whole flimsy affair of a vehicle went to pieces. One wheel darted in one direction, and another in another, while the horse, with a few splinters of the cart hanging on the harness, careered across the country like a Derby winner. This episode took place near a village, and it was not long before a crowd of peasants were on the scene. I had dismounted to see if I could be of any assistance, but it was an unwise proceeding, for after the excitement had somewhat abated



On the St. Petersburg high-road.

wear is scant and picturesque, men and women dressing almost exactly alike: that is to say, the women wear no skirts, a short white jacket reaching to the hips, and their nether limbs bound round and round with black cloth and rope, forming their apparel. On the whole, they were kindly disposed towards me, giving me milk and bread when I asked for it, and regarding me with the utmost curiosity; for, as far as I could gather, I was the first bicyclist to go through their country.

The week had not been without its adventures—or, rather, mishaps. *En route* between Wasil-Sursk and Tcheboksary I was the unfortunate cause of a bad accident of the tarantass order. A Cherimesen man

the cause of the accident was generally discussed, and from the glances and finger-points directed at me I concluded that the peasants meant me no good. And I was right. The villagers surrounded me, and one or two of them seized the machine. Things looked decidedly unpleasant, but by dint of a little manœuvring I got clear, and, mounting rapidly and ducking my head, spurred for all I was worth. There was a bellow of rage from the crowd, and a scampering of feet, but I had no difficulty in distancing them. Keeping up as fast a speed as the road would allow I did not feel safe until I had put a dozen versts between the village and myself.

CHAPTER V.

BORDERLAND.

KAZAN, with its population of 200,000, nearly half of whom are Tartars, is a large and interesting city, of almost Oriental aspect. To the south-east of the town lies the Tartar quarter, and here the Tartar, good Mussulman, has his mosques, wherein to pray as becomes a true follower of the Prophet. The Tartar quarter is squalid, but in no wise worse than the Russian, and, on the whole, I was prone to like the quiet, moody Moslem.

There is a bicycle club in Kazan, and the members have a nice little track in a garden of their own, whereon they practice. The track is too small for racing, but is used for learning. Here, in the garden, each evening during summer, the Kazan cyclists meet, and over the steaming samovar while the long evening away. The people seemed to take life pretty easily in this part of the world, most of their time apparently being taken up with tea-drinking and mosquito-dodging.

I left Kazan two days later, fourteen cyclists accompanying me for ten versts, where the macadamised road ended, and the landway began. I then had to foot it for ten versts owing to sand, carrying the bicycle on my shoulder. For the first six days after leaving Kazan the weather was lovely—fearfully hot, 'tis true—and as the road passed for five days through a dense forest, mosquitoes and flies were a perfect plague. On the last three days wet weather set in, and the road being of mould, I had to trudge it. Once the rain fell on these roads all hope of riding had to be abandoned, and one had to be thankful that, here and there, there was a strip of grass upon which to walk at all. The last day before reaching the important city of Perm was the worst.

It took me seven hours to cover twenty-three versts, and when I arrived in Perm I was so thoroughly knocked up that I had to go to bed at once.

The country between Kazan and Perm is mountaineous and interesting. Unfortunately for the traveller, however, there are no towns, and not the suspicion of an inn, for five hundred and fifty long miles. The people who inhabit this part of the country are Tartars, Votiaks, and Bashkires; most of them speak no Russian at all, and as I had to rely for food and shelter upon the good-will of the people, my difficulties may be imagined. The Votiaks are a wild lot, their principal occupation being fishing in the summer and wolf-hunting in the winter. The province of Viatka is covered almost entirely with a jungle-like forest, and here the hardy and semi-savage Votaik, armed only with spears, finds plenty of work with the wolves. The poverty of the people in this part of the world is most saddening; the villages are mere collections of wooden huts surrounded by feet deep slush. The best food to be obtained is eggs and bread, and on this I had to exist entirely for nine days.

In addition to these difficulties I had some terrible fights with wild animals on this road. These animals do not come out until after dark, and their favourite plan is to attack one while asleep. There depredations were awful, and I was not able sometimes to keep them at bay even with my revolver. They were bloodthirsty and persistent, seemed to show no fear, and attacked again and again in spite of all repulses. We call them bugs in England.

The principal product of Perm seems to be mud; a disagreeable, evil-smelling mud

it is, too. The streets are nearly all unpaved, and the roadways, consisting of the native earth, may be better imagined than described. On the day I arrived in Perm, I am confident the mud was a couple of feet thick. The wheels of the springless droskys and tarantasses which laboured through this mass of putrid filth were axle deep. Sanitation there is none in Perm, and the smell of the whole place is horrible. Out of all this squalor, however, twenty or thirty magnificent churches raise their golden cupolas to the sky. The money that is spent on churches in Russia must be something enormous. Apart from the costliness of the exterior, the altar of the Greek Russian Church is generally a blaze of silver, gold, and jewels. Panels of doors are made of silver, candlesticks of gold, pictures of saints studded with diamonds—untold wealth in fact. And here comes a ragged, shoeless mob to pray, who can neither read nor write, who from week-beginning to week-end had no better food than black bread, whose houses were mere hovels, and whose lives must be far worse than those of their grandfathers, who were slaves. This tremendous incongruity struck me all the way through Russia. In the most poverty-stricken village, where it is absolutely impossible to get a bit of food except a hunk of black bread, one came across a church which must have cost many thousands of pounds to build.

There was no cyclists' club in Perm, but there were about thirty or forty wheelmen who met casually and took runs together. I must say they treated me very kindly, for as soon as they heard of my advent to their town they got together and organised quite a swell dinner in the town club. Here came one of the bitterest disappointments of my life, for I had just finished my lunch in the hotel when the deputation from the cyclists arrived, desiring my presence at the banquet. However, having lived on eggs and bread for nearly a fortnight, I did not shirk the task, and went through two big dinners in two hours without any great trouble. Cycling is primitive in Perm: there are only one or two up-to-date machines; nobody rides more than a few versts out of town, owing to the shocking roads, and every man rides in top-boots—a mute tribute to the mud of the country.

For two days rain fell steadily, and it was

quite impossible to start out for Ekaterinburg—the first town across the Asiatic border. An officer, who had come per post-horses from Kungur, and who spoke German, informed me that the road was in a vile state, and it was with difficulty they could get the tarantass through the mud. Such intelligence as this was extremely dispiriting, but the rain clearing off the next day, I decided to make a start on the morning of June 19th, even if I could only go a few versts. Six cyclists accompanied me for six versts, which occupied exactly one hour. From the first station, however, I found dry running on the grass at the side of the road, and at 6 o'clock reached Kungur. I started from Kungur next morning, hoping to make seventy or eighty versts, but before I had been riding half an hour a pitiless rain set in, the road became a morass once more, and at twenty versts I had to seek shelter in a village. My luck with regard to the weather seemed certainly dead out. One would expect some decent riding to be had in June, but for weeks my clothes had not been dry for two consecutive days.

I have read that the reason the allied forces won the Crimean War was on account of Russian mud; that the allies were able to bring all their transports by water, while the Russians had to come over land, and *en route* got stuck in the mud to such an extent that more than half the guns, men, and commissariat never reached the heights of Sebastopol at all, although many of them were a year on the way. When I read this statement I was inclined to doubt it, but now I not only believe it heartily, but wonder that anybody at all was able to reach the Crimea overland if the mud was anything like it was in the Ural Mountains when I commenced the ascent of the Pass of Perm. Come wind, come rain, come bad roads, but spare me this Russian mud, for I became weary of it, having been—almost literally—up to my neck in it. The whole of the road from Kungur to the top of the pass was a track of mud, averaging from a foot to two feet in depth, and from barley water consistency to that of stiff dough. The former was not so bad—one could splash through a foot of liquid mud easily enough, it ran off the shoes and the wheels, but it was the latter which was my terror. It was a fearful job to pull your feet out, and when they did come it was with a "glug"

as if of disappointment at not retaining your boot. Such stuff, too, came up in huge chunks on the wheels, lodged in the forks, and carrying the bicycle thenceforward was the only method of progression. In the villages it was awful, for here there was no ditch as on the open road, where one could get occasional bits of grass to walk on, and the labour of getting through the mud of a hamlet became truly frightful. And as I struggled along, to add insult to injury, the moujiks in the villages wandered forth and seemingly enjoyed my plight to their heart's content. The moujik enjoys nothing better than to see a "barin" in difficulties. Under ordinary circumstances the crossing of the Ural Mountains would not have been easy work, but with such weather and such roads the task was one which I shall remember for the rest of my life.

For six days after leaving Perm I plodded on, up and up the winding pass, and had the weather been anything decent, I am sure I should have enjoyed to the full the beautiful scenery which characterises this portion of the Ural Mountains. The hills are not to be compared in height or grandeur to the Alps or the Balkans, but as a change from the deadly monotony of the fir-clad Russian plain, they were welcome. One pleasing feature was the quantity of flowers which carpeted the hill-sides, the perfume of which I infinitely preferred to the mud of the villages. Dense clumps of fir-trees crown most of the hills, the perspective is one glow of colour from the brow of the rises, and such is the tumbled nature of the mountains that there is no gradual incline, but a switchback all the way.

CHAPTER VI.

ACROSS THE BORDER INTO ASIA.

ON June 26th in the year of grace 1896, I reached the highest point in the pass of the Ural mountains and stood before the huge stone marking the boundary of Europe and Asia. A blazing sun, combined with the fatigue occasioned by a long walk up the slope, was sufficient inducement for me to pause a moment here—even if the emotion called forth by the fact that at length I had reached the borderland of that wonderful Siberia was not sufficient to make one pause. Here I was at last! Siberia! Towards which I had been cycling over four thousand odd miles of European roads. Siberia! The land of steppes, forests, mountains, mighty rivers, innumerable races—of almost illimitable space! What possibilities lay before me? What wonders should I see? What did that region which now lay before me contain to astonish, or even to terrify, a wandering Englishman? The sublimest phase of Siberia is its extent.

Right to the borders of Thibet, of Mongolia, of China; to the blue waters of the Pacific coast; to the tropical regions of Central Asia; to the perpetual ice of the Arctic circle stretches this wonderful land—to the capital of which—Irkutsk—it was my humble hope and wish to ride the present day pioneer of civilization—the bicycle.

Nestling among the sombre pine trees at the back of the stone was a rude log hut where some woodman passed his lonely life. I begged a glass of milk here from the woman who appeared at my knock, while half a dozen huge dogs sniffed suspiciously around my heels. A bicycle was a rarity in the Urals, and the woman, dark skinned and half nude, gazed with something like awe upon my mount. Where had I come from, and where was I going? I had not the courage to tell her from London, since such a statement would seem to her the most outrageous lie ever uttered, so I modestly

said I was from Perm and my destination was Ekaterinburg, some thirty vershs away.

The afternoon was waning, and having spent enough time in contemplation and sketching of the frontier stone, I make haste to cover the thirty vershs to Ekaterinburg. The mountain road was anything but good, being tortuous, rutty and with here and there some sharp declivities. Ten vershs from the border I cleared the pines and espied a small village, the last post-station before entering Ekaterinburg. At

station, which was much as other stations for post horses were—a couple of rooms devoid of any comfort. A few chairs placed systematically round the walls. Two wooden couches occupied one side—these the sleeping accommodation for whatever travellers might pass that way; some sickly plants passed a miserable existence in the small openings in the wall which served for windows. Ornamentation there was none save for the inevitable lithographs of the Emperor Nicholas pasted on the wall; the image of



The frontier stone.

the station itself, a small log house with the familiar black and white posts of the Russian government stuck outside, I was hailed by a bare-footed red-shirted moujik who was waving his arms excitedly for me to dismount: Was I the Englishman, Gospodin Jefferson? If so here were two letters for me. And would the good gospodin please come into the station and drink a glass of tea.

I needed no second bidding, for an intolerable thirst consumed me. I entered the

the Virgin Mary in a corner, before which burnt a small oil lamp, and the frame containing the tariff paper for post horses from station to station. Such is a brief picture of a Russian post station, which throughout the empire, takes the place of inns or hotels. The traveller indeed must be thankful that even these are in existence, since in the whole of Siberia there are not more than ten hotels.

The letters I found were from the President and Secretary of the Ekaterinburg

Cyclists Club, bidding me welcome to their town and stating that for four days past various members of the club had been patrolling the road in the hope of coming across me, and that ten versts further on a cyclist was posted who was to conduct me into the town. The tea consumed, I was off once more, and as the letter stated, at ten versts a cyclist, stationed like a sentry, was standing on a boulder by the roadside waiting for me. Ekaterinburg was now in sight, way down in the valley, the white sunlight glaring on the clustering houses and bur-nishing the brazen cupolas of the numerous churches till they glittered like gold.

My conductor, a young and ardent cyclist, who dashed over the stones and rubble at such a pace that several times he came to grief, at length pulled up before a large house on the outskirts of the town. This was a match factory, the property of the captain of the club, whose house, nestling in a perfect forest of foliage and flower, was hard by. The welcome I received here was of the warmest character. In a brace of shakes my bicycle was taken from me and half a dozen enthusiastic matchmakers were busily cleaning it. In another brace the mud which bespattered my person had been removed, and in yet another brace I was seated with the captain's family, with my legs under the captain's table, and doing ample justice to my first Asiatic dinner.

Telephones had been set in motion, and in half an hour thirty to forty members of the club had assembled, and from Mr. Alexander Roustchoff, the secretary and consul of the Union, I learnt that quarters had already been taken for me at the American Hotel, and all I had to do now was to make myself as happy as I could during the short time I should be in Ekaterinburg.

Such a welcome as this did much to wipe out the unpleasant impressions of my eight days hard labour in the Urals, where, what with mud and hills, bad roads, and bad food, mosquitoes and rain, I had been driven, if not to desperation, at least to dismay. I had been told that the Ekaterinburg cyclists had prepared a reception for me, but I certainly had not expected so much kindness.

Ere departing for the hotel the ubiquitous photographer put in an appearance, and having posed to his entire satisfaction, the club made a move for the town. Through broad but badly paved streets we wound

our way to the ringing of bells and the tootling of horns. It was evident that the club, or the members thereof, formed something important in the town of Ekaterinburg. Drosky drivers cleared out of the way, policemen saluted, people came to their doors and waved their caps. For the time being we owned the street through which we passed. Cycling is new, strange and wonderful in this Siberia; it has not yet come to be the purely common-place, and hence it is treated with a respect and deference that an Englishman can scarcely conceive.

Ekaterinburg has the reputation of being, next to Irkutsk, the richest town in Asiatic Russia, its proximity to the Ural mountains being the cause thereof. Iron and stone are the principal products, while gold mining is carried on with some degree of energy although the pan is but small when compared to the gold regions near Irkutsk. There are enormous works for the manufacture into ornaments of the celebrated Ural stones, the finest quality of Jasper, Malachite, and Lapis Lazurli being found in the Urals. These ornaments, *objets d'art*, and such trifles fetch large sums in Western Russia. In Petersburg and Moscow the possessor of a piece of Ural stone work is very proud of the fact and does not fail to call the attention of the visitor to his possession. "Look, Mr. Jefferson," was what I frequently heard in European Russia. "This ornament is from Ural stone. Very celebrated, very expensive."

Like most Russian towns, Ekaterinburg is roomy. A Russian can never complain of want of space. If he builds a town he covers as much ground as he possibly can and thus one gets a rather exaggerated notion of its size. In Ekaterinburg the streets are tremendously wide, there are many huge open spaces and public gardens. In a small way the electric light has been introduced, while telephone communication is *au fait accompli*. In a wilderness of uncivilization this Ural town is an oasis.

The cyclists were pressing in their invitation for me to spend at least a week amongst them, but two days were as much as I could spare from my itinerary, I had yet 2,500 miles to cover. The Siberian summer is short and I must reach my destination before the autumnal rains set in. There was a mass meeting of cyclists at my hotel on the

morning of my departure eastward ho ! and here I was the recipient of several handsome souvenirs in stone work from the club. A casket in malachite and a model of a Russian verst post being among them. Russians have a pretty, almost affectionate, way of making a present, dignified without ostentation. President Neumann made the presentation, first of all pinning the badge of the club on my coat.

"Robert Robertovitch," said he, "now you are going to leave us we want to tell you that we have been honoured by your visit to our town, the first Englishman to ride a bicycle from Europe to Siberia. We desire to give you one or two little souvenirs

of Ekaterinburg industry, this casket from malachite, this paper weight of stone fruit, this cigarette holder of jasper, and this model of a Russian verst post. When you are at home in London, and you smoke your cigarettes through this mouthpiece, and look upon that verst post, you will recall how many thousands of its original you have passed on your celebrated journey. Also we wish you luck and safety on your ride to Irkutsk ; may the sun always shine, and the wind always be on your back. If the road is good may the wind blow softly, when the road is bad may it blow very very strong. We wish you good-bye, Robert Robertovitch, and do not forget Ekaterinburg."



CHAPTER VII.

THE FRINGE OF THE STEPPE.

EASTWARD from Ekaterinburg there are but a few foot hills separating the traveller from the gigantic steppes which stretch away for nearly two thousand miles to the mountains of the Mongolian frontier. One is in fact out of sight of the Urals at Ekaterinburg, with the pleasant (or otherwise) prospect of an almost interminable plain before him. To Tiumen, a distance of three hundred miles, the country can hardly be called steppe, since it is clothed here and there with timber, and the perspective is slightly undulating; it is from Tiumen the steppe country commences, an enormous plain, partly arable land and partly morass, so flat that if one could get a gigantic spirit level and place it across the steppe from Tiumen to Tomsk, the bulb would not be disturbed from its centre. With such country a man can hardly be expected to write glowing word pictures of the scenery, and so far as I am concerned the only thing I can hope to convey to my readers' mind is the impression of a billiard table with a flea crawling across its surface. The table is the steppe, the flea myself.

Captain Barashova and several members of the club were to accompany me for some fifty versts. It was blazing hot when we left the town, and clouds of dust rose high from our wheels. The road was comparatively good, though exceedingly rutty and sandy. Having come over hundreds of miles of roads, however, where it had been quite impossible to ride for more than a hundred yards without dismounting, it was a pleasure to be able at least to keep in the saddle. Ten versts from Ekaterinburg the country opened out and we got extensive views of the wide rolling plain stretching on either hand as far as the eye could see. Here and there a clump of pines growing thickly together, or an oasis of willows nodding over some treacherous bog land. We passed through several villages, mere collections of log huts with shingle roofs and mud-plastered

walls. Squalor reigned supreme in these villages, the stench of which indeed was almost unbearable. Geese, oxen, pigs, and horses wandered aimlessly about, nosing for something edible in the filth of the ditches which ran by the side of the houses. Half clad men and women came to their doors and windows to gaze in wonderment upon our bicycles as we swished through in clouds of dust. Urchins, with a few rags by some marvel hanging on to their bodies, raced behind us with shrill cries of "Samokat! Samokat!" Oxen tumbled over each other to get out of our way; geese arched their necks and hissed defiantly at us; horses, impelled by a fearful terror, took to their heels and scudded across the country; dogs, more courageous, and large, long-haired and savage brutes they are, came after us in troops, snapping, snarling, and making the welkin ring with their barks.

A picturesque sight was presently brought to my notice: an encampment of gold washers at work by the road side. Innumerable streams flow eastward forming the watershed of the Urals, and here being the base, the streams are dammed and the beds scraped and washed for whatever deposit of gold may have been swept from the hills. Implements and method were primitive to a degree. There was no machinery, and the labour was female. Half-naked women puddled around up to their knees in water, swish-swashing a hoe-like instrument in the trough from the dam. There is but small result for an enormous amount of labour, the gold thus obtained being of but infinitesimal quantity.

It was sundown when we reached the village of Biloyarski, a long straggling street of log houses. From here the captain returned, but left me one of the members of the club who would conduct me next day to Kaminslov. I was not particularly impressed with Biloyarski, more especially when I learned that there was neither inn nor post

house at which we could get quarters for the night. Accommodation would have to be sought at some moujik's hut. My companion was a curious fellow, a typical Russian, who made no bones about swallowing the awful food which was placed before us. He would wash: well, a muddy river ran by the side of the village, and he went down and plunged his head in the water, and dried himself on his under-shirt. Our beds for the night: a couple of tarantasses in a stable yard. The originality of all this did not please me greatly. The tarantass was perhaps cleaner than the room of a hut would be, but sleeping in one's clothes is not enjoyable. Mosquitoes came in the dead of the night and made their depredations. Dogs and pigs prowled about us and I could not sleep, but rather preferred to gaze up at the starlit sky while the music of my companion's snores blended harmoniously into the buzz and birr of insects and the soft lapping of the river.

At two o'clock the grey light of dawn appeared, and waking my companion I impressed upon him the necessity of making a move before the sun got up and made things hot. He consented, and forthwith we mounted our wheels, and in a few minutes were out in the bare country again. I rather enjoyed this midnight ride, for villagers and their domestic pets were wrapped in slumber. There were no tarantasses or horses to block one's way, while the early morn was delightfully cool. A brisk pace was kept up and the verst posts went by with gratifying rapidity. The sun came up a mass of white fire right ahead of us, light sparkling and dancing on the dew in the long grass. We paused at one of the villages and battered at the door of a hut intent on begging a drink of milk. A red-shirted moujik with eyes blubbed with sleep, with tangled hair and tousled beard, thrust his head from the window and gazed idiotically at us. But my companion's commanding tone was enough; the milk forthcame and then once more we wended our way. At eleven o'clock, just when the sun was making its presence felt, we sighted

Kaminslov, the half-way stage to Tiumen.

Here my companion had an acquaintance who was also a cyclist. The freemasonry of the wheel was at once evident. The new-found friend threw open wide the doors of hospitality, and for the time I was happy with good food and good sleep. 150 miles more to Tiumen, and this I wanted to cover in two days, not a very formidable task with good roads and good weather. I was up betimes next day with my front wheel once more eastward pointed and through a country which was perceptibly getting flatter and more barren, made excellent progress. I had for a companion for part of the way a Kaminslov cyclist who sported a solid-tyred safety and one of the most outrageous cycling suits I have ever clapped my eyes on. A sky-blue costume trimmed with lace, top boots, and a jockey cap with a five-inch peak. His cycle was heavy and he lagged considerably. As mid-day approached the sun got hotter and hotter, and the more my comrade lagged. I was compelled now and again to seek the shelter of some trees and wait for him to come up, but once I distanced him considerably. Coming to a small village I sought shelter and food, and while waiting fell asleep for three hours on a bench in a stable yard. Where was my companion?—surely he must have grown disgusted and returned to Kaminslov? I was preparing to resume my way when there was the ringing of a bell and in reeled my quaintly attired friend in a most woe-begone condition. A huge towel encircled his head from which water was dripping in tiny cas-



Ural gold diggers.

cares, his handsome suit was covered with dust. Poor fellow, he had had a sunstroke and had fallen into a ditch, where he had been found by a moujik and restored to consciousness. His face was haggard, his manner was woeful, his tale was pitiful, and I sympathised with him!

Next day at sundown I rode into Tiumen, a large straggling town on the banks of the river Toura, a military depôt, and a port for the distribution of Siberian merchandise. Armed with a letter of introduction to Mr. Peter Lagin, a merchant and a cyclist, I sought to find his house, but my Russian must have been execrably bad or else those who directed me thought it a huge joke to see me wandering about the town. At length a small boy on a large bicycle hove in sight, and like a pirate bearing down on a defenceless brig I was after him like a shot. Did he know where Peter Lagin lived? Yes, he did. Well then, small boy, be good enough to conduct a wandering stranger to Peter Lagin's domicile. An office which the small boy performed graciously and to my entire satisfaction.

I found Peter Lagin to be what one would call a "character" in England. He had already received notification of my intention to visit Tiumen. But the manner in which he dashed about when I did arrive, in order to assure me of the hospitality of his house was highly astonishing in so respectable, be-spectacled, and grave-looking gentleman such as he was. He bubbled over with enthusiasm, and not until I was safely ensconced in comfortable quarters did he seem at ease. He spoke German and thus we were able to converse. There were twelve cyclists in Tiumen he told me, and he believed he was the only one who possessed

an up-to-date mount. He did not ride much, but he could ride well. Nor did his accomplishments end here. He confessed he spoke English. "Listen," said he proudly: "Long live England. Marley is dead; there's no doubt about that. Wisdom of our ancestors! *Ist das gut?*"

Tiumen is but a sample of an ordinary Russian small town. A wilderness of sand and dust and a plenitude of rickety one-storey frame houses. A huge space for a market place—crowded with Tartars in their skull caps, Russian moujiks in their fur hats and red shirts; tarantasses and oxen, all ankle-deep in sand. On the edge of the Tartar steppe Tiumen receives Siberian merchandise which comes per caravan from all parts of Asiatic Russia and is then conveyed by rail to Europe. The railway ends here, and horses on the road or steamers on the rivers are the only means of communication with interior Siberia. The new line from Samara to Vladivostock, known as the Siberian railway, is five hundred miles south of Tiumen and is yet not half finished.

Peter Lagin came with me next day for a few versts in order to put me on the right road. The Siberian track and the steppe fairly commenced here. Long caravans of tarantasses were coming into the town, Tartars on horseback, and moujiks on foot. Dust was on the roadway, dust was in the air, dust everywhere, with the copper sun glaring through it savagely.

Having put me on the right road, Peter Lagin prepared to return to Tiumen. "Good-bye" said he shaking my hand cordially. "Marley is dead. There's no doubt about that. Wisdom of our ancestors. Long live England. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GREAT TARTAR STEPPE.

FOR the first three days I had not much reason to complain of the road, although here and there I came across stretches of sand through which it was impossible to ride and next door to impossible to walk. It must be remembered that the great Siberian road is not a made road at all, being a track over the native earth furrowed out by millions of caravans since the first caravan ever started. The traveller has two things to guide him, the wheel marks and the telegraph posts, no effort whatever is evident of the roads being enclosed. In fact I think I am right in saying that from Tiumen to Ashinsk the entire road has been made by those who have come over it; not one penny having been spent on its making. In very dry weather the surface naturally crumbles to a powder, a foot or more in depth, and in wet weather it is simply impossible to ride. The earth becomes a gluey clay, one sinks deeply into it and even walking is impossible. To ride a bicycle therefore across Siberia is only possible when the weather is good, and this I had already realised.

The inhabitants of the Tartar steppe are principally Bashkires, a formerly nomadic race, the majority of whom have now settled down into law abiding peaceable villagers. There are, nevertheless, still large numbers of Bashkires who are tent dwellers, wandering from place to place and making a living by the breeding of cattle. During my ride across the steppe I came across many such, and ferocious looking individuals as they were, they suffered me to pass in peace. They are picturesque vagabonds, excessively lazy and caring for nothing so long as they can get enough black bread to eat and enough koumiss to drink. Tartars form some portion of the community but the

flaxen-haired Russian is in preponderance in all the villages. One wonders, in passing through these villages, what can be the industry of the peasants. There is scant evidence of agriculture; of manufacture absolutely *nil*, and yet these peasants live. True it is an awful living, but there they are, there they exist, and there they multiply. How they get the means of existence is not apparent to the eye. It is probably from the land, but this, as I have shown, is but miserably cultivated, in spite of the fact that the soil is of the richest quality.

I wonder if it is possible to write a book on Siberia without introducing the subject of wolves. According to all authorities on Asiatic Russia, Siberia and wolves are almost synonymous. A flat, snow-covered region, with thousands of exiles in hundreds of mines, millions of wolves in impenetrable forests! Is not that the general impression of Siberia? Can one imagine such heat as I experienced in the month of July—in *Siberia*? and yet with such heat I had hoped to avoid the subject of wolves, for your wolf without snow, without the inevitable troika and jangling bells, rifles and revolvers, is not orthodox, and this leads me up to a big fright I had on the steppe.

Here and there one comes across an oasis in this desert like land, a clump of pines or firs, something to relieve the deadly monotony of the waste of sand and marsh. Some hundred miles north of Ishim I came across such an oasis and sought shelter in the shade of the foliage. The day was insufferably hot and not a breath of air disturbed the two-foot long grass which grew in lank luxuriance all around me. Lazily puffing at a cigarette and keeping the mosquitoes at bay with constant flicking of my kerchief I was almost dozing when, with a suddenness

which made my heart leap into my mouth, four animals of unmistakeable genus appeared before me, slouching through the grass at the base of the firs. Wolves! there was no mistaking them. Of enormous size, long cadaverous jaws, shaggy hair, perfectly black, and as thin as rakes. What was the right thing to do at the moment I could not conceive, and I must confess to a feeling of terror I had never before experienced. My first impulse was to fire upon them, my next to dodge round the trees, and my next to

cigarette, I did not mind the heat, but simply got out on the road with despatch and headed toward Ishim.

At Ishim next day I related my adventure to a German traveller who was tarantass bound to Turkestan. He laughed at my fright and assured me that there was not the slightest danger from wolves in the summer. "Little children," said he, "could go on the steppe without risk. Ah, but," and he shook his finger seriously, "If it had been in the winter it might have been different."



On the road to Omsk.

mount the bicycle. All the many stories of wolf adventures I had read flashed upon me, but above all the statements which I had had drummed into my ears from end to end of European Russia—that a wolf would never attack a man in summer. The animals halted, not twenty paces away, and then turned in my direction. I jumped up like a shot, and that action was enough. Instantly the wolves had stopped and the next second had turned and like lightning disappeared among the trees. I did not finish my

According to the map, Ishim looks a big place, and so it is, but there was neither inn nor hotel in the town, and I had to seek shelter and accommodation at the Post-house, and wretched accommodation it was. It is this entire lack of comfort which makes travelling so difficult and miserable in Siberia. Here I was in a town with some 10,000 inhabitants, which boasted some splendid private dwelling; a huge gendarmine, and about a dozen magnificent churches; and the only food I could get was

black bread, eggs, and the inevitable tea. I gave one of the officials two roubles, to get me a beef steak, or a piece of meat of any kind, but it was impossible. I asked for a bottle of soda water, but the nearest approach to it was some carbonate of soda, obtained from a pharmacy, mixed in a glass of yellow unfiltered river water. A wooden bench was my couch, a frowsy sheep-skin coat my covering.

At Ishim passport difficulties occurred in Siberia for the first time. In duty bound the post-master took my passport to the gendarmerie and after the absence of an hour returned with the intelligence that I must proceed to the presence of the "capitaine" at once. What was amiss? I had been careful to obtain all the visés *en route*. I found the captain an exceedingly officious and blustering individual, decked out in all the panoply of his office, and before whom his retainers cringed like curs. On my appearance he held my passport at arm's length, and demanded to know why I hadn't got the visé of Tobolsk. In my broken Russian I explained for the good and sufficient reason that I had not passed through Tobolsk. "Then why had I not passed through Tobolsk?"

"Because it would have been a thousand versts out of my way."

"Very good, what are you?"

"An Englishman!"

"Oh! An Englishman, what are you doing in Siberia?"

"My passport explains."

"I cannot read English. You must remain in Ishim while I send your passport to Tobolsk."

"How long will that take?"

"Probably a week."

I was consumed with rage; the fellow's insolence and officiousness was more than I could bear. I took the passport from him and pointed out the words—"Request and require in the name of Her Majesty all those whom it may concern—to allow Robert Louis Jefferson, British subject, to pass freely without let or hindrance and to afford him every protection and assistance of which he may stand in need." Translating this as well as I could into Russian. The captain simply laughed at me. "You remain here," he said, with a malicious grin, and pointed to the door as a hint for me to clear out.

But I was not going to be cleared out so easily. A happy thought struck me. Pulling out my pocket-book I extracted a paper and laid it before him. It was a telegram written in Russian and addressed to the British Consulate in St. Petersburg announcing that I was detained by the police for unwarrantable reasons, and requesting immediate steps and enquiries to be made at head quarters." It was one of a sheaf of such telegrams I had prepared for all exigencies. It was a dodge—and it worked.

"I desire to leave Ishim to-morrow morning at seven o'clock," said I. "If you keep my passport longer than that I send this telegram to St. Petersburg. This is a scandal!"

I had already learnt that the word "scandal" is one of the stiffest you can use to a government functionary, as it implies anything from murder to petty larceny. The captain once again pointed to the door, but this time in a quieter manner. I went, and in half-an-hour a soldier brought my passport with the captain's compliments. I could not resist a chuckle.

It rained during the night, and next day the roads were awful. I struggled on to a village called Avatskoe on the banks of the River Ishim. Heavy rains had been falling in the district for weeks past, the Ishim has overflowed its southern bank, and for two miles the roadway was entirely under water. I looked with dismay upon this awful sight, and cursed my luck and everything Russian. I crossed the river next day in a boat, thinking that by shouldering the machine I might be able to walk through the flood. The banks of the river were crowded with tarantasses which had been stuck in the mud, and the Bashkire and Tartar owners laughed loudly at my bicycle. My attempt was a ghastly failure. I sank deep in the mire, and had it not been for a couple of Tartars who came to my rescue, I might have been there still. I returned to Avatskoe, where the post-master told me that at three versts or two miles the road was dry, and if I liked he would get a telega and couple of horses to take me to dry land. I gladly fell in with his proposal, and the attempt to cross the inundation was once more made. It was a terrific struggle. The water came to the level of the floor of the telega, the horses were up to their bellies. The Yemshik standing on the shafts, lashed and whooped,

whooped and lashed, and ultimately we got stuck. The Yemshik wiped the sweat from his brow and turned to me plaintively. "Little Father," said he, "will you give me a rouble if I return and fetch more horses." "I'll give you two roubles," said I, "if you will get me out of this mess."

blessed my mother, I even believe he blessed my bicycle. Certainly, if one half of his wishes were to come true, my future life would indeed be a happy one.

For the next three days I struggled on over the steppe, sleeping at miserable post stations at night, and living entirely on black



The Gates of Omsk.

Taking one of the horses the yemshik returned to the village, and in an hour returned with two more specimens of equine power. Dry land was at length reached, the yemshik got his two roubles, and he poured forth on my head all the blessings he could think of. He blessed my father, he

bread and eggs. At the village of Orlova I was obliged to stop two days owing to awful rains, but my heart rejoiced when on the 12th day of July I came in sight of the broad and magnificent Irtysh, with the big city of Omsk on its other bank.

CHAPTER IX.

OMSK.

SEEN from the banks of the river Irtysh Omsk looks a fine city, but like all Oriental centres, distance lends that enchantment we so often read about. I crossed the river by a huge ferry boat, crowded with Khirghiz cossacks, who jostled and fought amongst each other for places in a manner which clearly showed their aggressive natures, and landed on the other bank to find Omsk a bit worse than other towns through which I had passed; unpaved streets, heaps of dust and sand, thousands of one-storey log houses, rickety, sunburnt, with foundations gone, and filthy to gaze upon. Not a street which could be called decent, not a house that wouldn't disgrace Europe. Churches, of course, without number, these the only buildings which lent anything like respectability to the town, and several mosques, for the Khirghiz population is large, and the Khirghiz, like the Tartars, are Mohammedans. I put up at the best hotel, a log house, of most uninviting aspect, the women attendants of which went round bare-footed, while the men sported top-boots and red shirts. The room I obtained was almost bare of furniture; a truckle bed; a table; a sofa, propped up on one side with a couple of stones; bare plaster walls with holes here and there, and a washing arrangement in the corner—ah! let me describe that washing arrangement.

A metal bowl with a hole in the bottom, and a dirty pail underneath; a square mysterious-looking arrangement overhead which on further investigation turns out to be a tank of water, to which is attached a spout. At the foot of the stand which supports the bowl is a lever. You press this with your foot and from the spout jets a stream of water which simply swamps you if you don't dodge quick enough. More water goes on the floor than in the bowl, but what does that matter? it's the only water the floor ever gets. There was no communication with the individual who served as waiter. If I wanted anything I had to hunt around and dig him out of his pots and pans, or from the stable. He was a handy sort of man; looked after the horses, scraped away the mud from tarantasses, cooked the food, performed the domestic duties known as emptying the slops, and then brought you your food. He didn't trouble to wash his hands in between his diversified duties. How could he, poor fellow, when he had so much to do? A nice hotel, eminently suitable for Russian travellers—and no others.

At Omsk one comes across the Khirghiz cossacks for the first time; a strange wild lot, who seem to live on horseback. Their complexion is quite black and the cast of features Mongolian, high protruding cheek bones and almond shaped eyes. Their cos-



The Military Academy at Omsk.

tumes are as savage as their looks and when I learned that the Baraba steppe, which I had now to cross, was the home of these wild nomads I mentally concluded that I would give them as wide a berth as possible. Better known as the Khirghiz hordes, these people have probably caused more trouble to the Russian government than any other Asiatic race. A purely nomad tribe, whose sole life was war and fighting, the Khirghiz are still to some extent beyond the pale of Russian control. They live and multiply on the great steppes, roaming from place to place, the government recking little what they do among themselves so long as they keep the peace towards Russians.

Incessant rain kept me in Omsk longer than I wanted to remain, but on the morning of July 18th I cleared out, not at all impressed with the town, and filled with the intention of making as good time as possible to Tomsk, a thousand versts away. I left Omsk with one or two additions to my department of defence: a net which I should have to wear

on the steppe to protect my face from mosquitoes, and a bowie knife which a Finnish gentleman I met assured me I ought to take. The steppe, I understood, was not altogether safe. Every year large numbers of Siberian convicts escape from the mines and make their way through the woods and over the steppe towards Europe, really the only means of getting away, for the Mongolian and Thibetan mountains are impassable to the south. I had five shots in my Smith and Wesson, it is true—"but," said the Fin, "what will you do when they are finished? Take the bowie, it may be useful. Don't stop on the way to speak to anyone. Don't show that you have any money. Don't sleep anywhere but in a post house."

Not a pleasant prospect truly. But armed with a revolver and a bowie knife, and with two hundred roubles sewn up in a secret pocket, I felt good enough to take care of myself. And thus I set out for my seven hundred miles' jaunt over the great steppe of Baraba.



A Khirghiz Cossack.

CHAPTER X.

CROSSING THE BARABA STEPPE.

MY first day's ride on the steppe was a glorious success, the track (for it certainly cannot be called a road) was smooth, dry, and in good going order. I had the wind behind, and for the first time since leaving the European chaussée I was able to ride in comfort and at a decent speed. I was soon clear of Omsk, pedalling away merrily to the music of the wind through the long grass. The first village was thirty-five miles away, and beyond a lone tarantass drawn by a couple of oxen, which I met half-way, not a sign of life was there on the great steppe.

Monotonous? How could it be otherwise? Think of it! a field circumscribed only by the horizon; not a bush, not a tree; a long line of telegraph posts dwindling to nothingness in the distance. Hours brought not the slightest change in the surroundings. I might as well have been pedalling a stationary cycle or home trainer for all the difference that took place around me. At the end of three hours a sparkle of light appears on the horizon; in a few moments the round green dome of a church is distinguishable; a few moments more the dull blur of houses huddled together. Verst follows verst, still the telegraph posts flash by with monotonous regularity, and gradually the village ahead takes shape. In half-an-hour you wheel through its only street, surrounded by a hundred snarling dogs, while men, women, and children pour from their houses and tumble over each other in order to get a glimpse of the strange vehicle which to all appearance has dropped from the clouds amongst them.

I made seventy-five miles that day, and was in the seventh heaven of delight at my progress; but 'twas not to last, for when,

next morning, I looked from the tiny window of the moujik's hut where I had passed the night it was to discover sodden roads and a pitiless rain.

For the next three days I struggled on as best I could, taking advantage of every spell of clear weather to ride or to walk a few versts. What a ruin a little rain makes of these roads. Riding is impossible, and walking next door to it. One cannot wheel the machine, for the wheels firmly refuse to revolve. Carrying the bicycle is slavery, even when it is possible, which is not often, for one's equilibrium in a foot depth of gluey clay is disturbed. On such roads the bicycle is actually a bar to progress. To add to my disappointment I discovered that since the railway had been constructed from Omsk to Tomsk the necessity of post houses was gone and consequently they had been abandoned. The safe shelter of the post station was therefore denied me, and each night I had to put up at a "*Zemski Quartier*" or moujik's house, simply a lodging house where the wayfarer can get shelter for the night for a few kopeks.

On July 22nd I rode into Kainsk, which I expected to find at least passably decent since it was big enough to boast a post and telegraph office. Armed with my *padorojnai* I made for the post office without delay and found a ramshackle building with some stables at the back and not a sign of life anywhere. I got in at a back entrance and, after wandering through several rooms littered with parcels of all descriptions, discovered a red-shirted shoeless individual curled up in a corner snoring vigorously. After prodding him in the ribs for a few minutes he slowly rose to a sitting posture, opened his bleared eyes and pushed his

matted hair from his face. He gazed woodenly at my *padorojnai*, addressed something to me which will remain a black mystery till the day of judgment, handed the paper back, curled himself up once more, and in two seconds had resumed his nasal solo.

No hope from this individual, evidently, so I got out into the yard again where a sore-eyed dog was sniffing suspiciously at my bicycle. Kainsk was dead asleep. I mounted the machine, and rode out into the street, looking for somebody to direct me to a *Zemski*. At the corner stood a tarantass with a miserable specimen of equine power between the shafts, and an equally miserable-looking individual fast asleep underneath. If the horse had moved the man would have had a wheel over his neck—but that's a small matter in Siberia. I attempted to awaken him, not out of pity for his precarious position, but because I wanted his advice. I might as well have attempted to awaken the dead. He was not only sleepy but he was drunk. I have heard

the expression "blind drunk" applied to an intoxicated man, but in this tarantass driver it was literally true. He was as inanimate as a dish cloth and six times as unconscious.

The legend "magazin" suddenly caught my eye and I discovered a wooden shanty where cigarettes, tea and sardines were obtainable. A woman who, if she wasn't a hundred, was within hailing distance of it, waited on me, gave me change out of a rouble in old Russian copper money, at least a pound of it, and sent me on my way with certain indefinite directions as to the *locale* of the *Zemski*.

Happy Siberia! Happy Siberians! May the onward march of progress and civilization deal lightly with you—or better, may it never reach you, for what would you do, poor inert vodki-sodden land, with competition, energy, and brains? Happy in your filth, sublime in your laziness and ignorance, why disturb you in what is, after all your Eden?



CHAPTER XI.

LOST ON THE STEPPE.

I LEFT Kainsk without feelings of regret and by sundown had made a small village, where, after holding the customary *levée* with dogs and villagers, I obtained shelter and proceeded to make short work of one of the boxes of sardines I had purchased. It was a sumptuous repast, black bread, sardines, and tea, and the heavy-footed custodian of the Zemski quarter proved himself to be a man of tremendous intellect, for by some occult means he produced a plate of strawberries. True, they were green and the size of peas, but why grumble? It was the first fresh fruit I had seen since leaving England. I chanced stomach troubles and consumed the lot, the while that curious villagers, in detachments of twos and threes, came blundering into the apartment to gaze open-mouthed at me and my bicycle, which was at my side; whispering to each other and evidently pondering deeply as to what sort of animal I was. Now and again some peasant, more bold than his fellows, would twist the pedals of the machine or address some incomprehensible question to me. I knew sufficient of Russian to follow the drift of the conversation, and the references to "engine," "steam," and "rail, way," showed that they imagined the bicycle had something to do with the new Siberian Railway in course of construction. One gifted individual gave off his opinion and knowledge of the machine at some length. He explained to the crowd with many "what! what's!" ("there, there,") that the machinery for the propulsion of the vehicle was all concealed in the gear case. Someone ventured to ask why I turned my feet round, but the instructor was equal to this. He explained that I turned my feet round in order to maintain my balance. If I didn't

turn my feet round the engine would topple over; therefore, "what! what!" when the engine was inclined to fall on the right side, all I had to do was to press down the lever on the other side! Certainly the most ingenious explanation of the bicycle balance I have ever heard.

Dull weather next day, and inclined to rain. When I started out a thick white mist lay like a blanket on the steppe, and it was impossible to see more than a few yards ahead. By mid-day this had cleared somewhat, but the sky was still overcast and gloomy. I was now in the centre of the steppe, and already beginning to experience its awful monotony, but something was to occur to break the spell.

Here and there the line of telegraph posts and the road did not exactly follow each other, one or the other would take a short cut, but as invariably they rejoined after a verst or two, I took no notice of the matter. It was soon after mid-day that the telegraph and road bifurcated, and I kept serenely on; calculating how long it would take to the next village; reckoning how many miles I had done; how many more to do; how long at fifty miles a day it would take me to reach Irkutsk, and so on, until, suddenly, it struck me I had been a long time without the telegraph posts. Thinking, however, that sooner or later they would be bound, like the prodigal son, to come back, I continued on the even tenour of my way. One hour, two hours passed, still no telegraph. This was serious. Could I have wandered off on to a bye-road? It was quite possible, for the bifurcations on the road are many, and the main track itself is no more clearly defined than a foot-path.

I stopped in perplexity. I was absolutely

alone on this great melancholy steppe. I dared not proceed farther, for I could have no idea how many hundreds of miles I might have to go before reaching a human habitation. What should I do? In a moment I had made up my mind, and that was to strike across the steppe to the southward, where I knew the telegraph must be.

Where the grass was not too long I was able to ride a little, but treacherous bogs and marshes abounded, and once I sank nearly up to my middle in a quagmire, which I had mistaken for hard ground. It was a narrow squeak, and made the sweat come out with the thought of what I had barely missed.

For two hours I continued on my way, the conviction gradually but surely overcoming me that I was lost. Once this got

steppe,

The sight was something which gladdened my heart more than I can tell. I made a bee-line for the smoke, and in half-an-hour came across a dozen tents forming an encampment of nomad Khirghiz. Striding out of the long grass into the middle of the clearing, my appearance created the utmost astonishment and consternation amongst the group of men, women, and children seated around a fire, over which, on a tripod, a metal bowl was slung. The children screamed, the women dashed for the tents, and the men started to their feet in alarm.

In Turkey and Bulgaria I have seen some ferocious-looking people, but the Turks and the Bulgars are as mild as milk compared to the aspect of the people before me. I has-



A Khirghiz Tent.

possession of me, I became terrified, wandered hither and thither in the hope of finding some trace of a road-way, but all my efforts were in vain, and ultimately I came to a stop and began to calculate how long it takes to die of starvation. It would be idle to say that I was not terrified. On the main road itself the villages are fifty to sixty versts apart, but north or south one can go thousands of versts without coming across human life; for northward the steppe goes without interruption to the Arctic Sea, and southward to Turkestan and the Chinese frontier.

All I could do was to keep, on hoping against hope to find the road. Once I came to a small lake and attempted to drink the water, but it was salt. Almost despairing, my eyes bulged when, away ahead, I saw a small blue cloud of smoke rising from the

tened to explain to them what I was, and begged them for food and water.

Thieves, murderers, call them what the Russians like, in a moment the Khirghiz had brought me a leather skin full of water, and some black bread. In the bowl over the fire simmered the dismembered remains of some wild fowl of which I was invited to partake. "*Pashaltz, Barin, kooshet, pashaltz, kooshet*" ("Eat, please, Barin, eat, please"), said the most villainous-looking man of the lot, and I ate and ate heartily, while the women and children came from their tents and gazed wonderingly upon me.

The Khirghiz horses were hobbled near, and I asked if one of the party would show me the way to the track. In a moment four horses were unhobbled and four swarthy Khirghiz on their backs. I really think they

took a delight in me. Splendid horsemen they, circling round me as I bumped slowly over the hillocky ground. Now one would give a little screech, and in a second his horse would fly over the steppe like the wind, its rider lying flat on its neck. Anon he would return, curvetting his horse in front of me, his swarthy face flushed, and his eyes flashing with excitement.

In an hour I espied the telegraph posts, and there was the vagrant road running beside them. Here I parted with my Khirghiz friends,

and offered them a few roubles as some reward for their kindness, but they waved the money aside. "No, no," said the chief, "you are welcome, Barin, you are welcome." They seemed mightily amused when I shook hands with them and mounted. They stood on the edge of the road and watched me depart. At the bend I took off my cap and waved it to them, and the chief responded by firing his pistol in the air. In a few moments they were lost to sight, and I was alone again on the wide steppe.



Tyre repairing on the steppe.

CHAPTER XII.

ARRIVAL AT TOMSK.

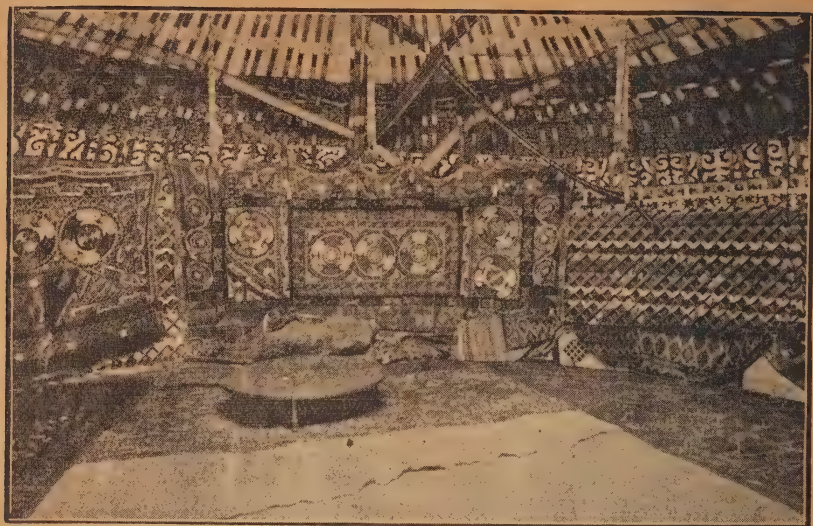
ON July 25 I rolled into Kolyvan, distant from Tomsk about 200 versts. I had been told that I should find Kolyvan slightly better than Kainsk, but if anything I found it slightly worse. I had no difficulty, however, in discovering the Zemski lodging house, but I had extreme difficulty in discovering food. Does it not seem astonishing that in these small Russian towns there is not the slightest accommodation for travellers, not the suspicion of an inn or any place where one can get a bit of food or a drink? Russian travellers, right from the time when travelling was first instituted in Russia, have been in the habit of carrying everything with them, even their beds and bed clothes, and in some cases their bedsteads. This perhaps is the explanation as to why there is nothing to be obtained in any of the Siberian towns, but a simple covering from the sky. Now and again I have come across a traveller bound to some distant region, and the proportion of his baggage is something colossal. Beds, bedding, food, drink, everything that is necessary. How hard for me, then, with nothing except a little bag of tea and another of sugar. My couch at night is either the floor or a wooden bench, with no covering except my mackintosh, and with my coat for a pillow. I prefer my coat to the pillow which it is possible here and there to beg from the bed of the Zemski keeper, for the latter is invariably alive with vermin. Kolyvan is a fair sample of the sort of accommodation a traveller can get, and if that traveller offered a thousand pounds he couldn't get better: a dirty room, with wooden unpapered walls, a wooden bench in the corner, a ricketty table and a few badly used chairs. I asked for hot water and made some tea; for food, and all that

was obtainable was a bit of black bread. "Have you meat?" said I. "No," was the answer. "Fish?" "No." "Sardines?" "No." "Eggs?" "No." "Butter?" "No." "Jam?" "No." "Fruit?" "No." Nothing but a piece of black bread, and this in a town of over ten thousand inhabitants. Carry it with you or go without, is what I have found to be the case in Siberia.

Soon after leaving Kolyvan it is easy to perceive that the steppe is coming to an end. The flat plain of grass is here and there undulating, a few bushes then appear, and anon some clumps of trees at scattered intervals. The road, too, loses some of its dead levelness; a few gentle rises at first, with corresponding gentle declines. At the village of Dubrovinskoe, the first abrupt hill occurs, and here I came in sight of one of Siberia's largest rivers, the Obi.

A ferry boat, with a couple of huge paddles at one end, worked by four horses that trotted round on a wooden platform, bore me to the eastern bank of the river, and having rewarded the ferryman with "Tchi-dengee" or tea-money, set off once more. The road was now very hilly, and the surface in parts execrable, for the hills were mere huge sand heaps. The bare barren steppe had now given place to a fir-clad country. Here and there the scenery was really fine. Away to the right, a range of blue mountains was just discernable, the foothills below them being one mass of sombre pine and fir. I had to foot it up some of the steepest hills, and had it not been for the bad surface should have got some fine coasts. I made Bolotinskoe that night, and next day set out in good spirits, for only 105 versts separated me from Tomsk.

At the first village, Prokokovo, I had in-



Interior of a Khirghiz Tent.

tended sending a telegram to Tomsk to notify a cyclist (to whom I had an introduction) of my coming, but I found Prokokovo a heap of smouldering ruins. Two days previously, a fire had occurred, and in a couple of hours there wasn't a house standing. When they have a fire in Siberia they don't do things by halves. They go the whole hog. It was a dismal night to see the wretched people wandering about in the blackened ruins of what—however poor and humble they might be—were their homes.

Little occurred now to mar my progress to Tomsk except the, in parts, unrideable roads; and a sportive tarantass driver who

would persist in racing me. We passed and repassed each other at intervals, and once when I got a bit of smooth running I made a race of it. Delighted at being "taken on," the yemshik whipped up his horses and came bouncing after me at top pace. He was never fated to reach me, however, for a wheel came off his vehicle, and the whole lot, horses, tarantass, and driver, disappeared into a deep ditch on the side of the road.

At 5 o'clock I came to the banks of the Tom, was ferried across, and half-an-hour later was walking through the deep dust of the main street of Tomsk.

CHAPTER XIII.

MY IMPRESSION OF TOMSK.

RIGHTLY or wrongly Tomsk possesses the reputation of being the third city in point of importance in Siberia. First comes the capital—Irkutsk, then Tobolsk, then Tomsk, and afterwards in any sort of order, Omsk, Yakatsk, Barnaul (the gold city), Vladivostock (the Pacific coast port), Krasnoïarsk, and Kaborovsk. Tomsk, as a sample of a Siberian city, is interesting from the very fact of its extraordinary mixture of primitiveness and civilization. Churches, as in all Russian centres, are the finest buildings, and the Dom, or Cathedral, which stands on the crown of a small hill, is really beautiful. But the streets and the shops, and the houses of the middle folk, alas! what relics of ancient Russia they are. One storey log houses are both the latter, with a veneer of plaster on the outside, as if there were a half-hearted attempt to make the people believe they are of stone, plaster covered, by amateurish skill, with a coating of pink or blue wash—a hideous combination. The streets are unpaved, the surface being the native earth cut deep into by the millions of wheels which have passed over them for generations, and reek with accumulated filth. Sanitation there is absolutely none in Tomsk—but they have the electric light. You cannot enter a house without nearly breaking your leg in the flooring, or knocking your head off against the door-joint—yet these houses have electric bells. The cabs which patrol the city are lumbering masses of filth, and a London dustman would prefer his own vehicle to one—but they have the telephone all over the city. The pavements of the town are made of shingle wood with huge gaps here and there; the air is congested with a fog like and odoriferous dust, in wet weather the

streets are calf deep in mud—yet they have a theatre which would do credit to any European city. The common Tomskites are ragged, shoeless, indescribably dirty, utterly illiterate, and proudly lazy—and yet they have a magnificent university. The incongruity of Tomsk is most astonishing. One or two of the most up-to-date and expensive, yet almost unnecessary, improvements have been introduced, yet what appear to be most essential to the comfort of the people, sanitation and paving, have never been thought of. Electricity in Tomsk! It is like fitting up the cow shed with Chippendale furniture.

I stayed two days in Tomsk, and the longer I stayed the more I got disgusted with it. For a traveller there is absolutely no comfort. If I wanted a drink I had to go out and purchase a bottle of lemonade at a shop and carry it home. Nothing in the shape of a restaurant, café, or saloon graces this enormous city. Food at the best—I was going to say hotel, but there is no such thing in Tomsk, they are called “Nummero,” meaning a house where you can hire a room at a ruinous outlay—is coarse, badly cooked, and dirtily served. One’s room is utterly devoid of comfort. You are supposed to provide your own bedding, pillows, towels, and washing utensils, as well as food. The only thing the Tomsk hotel can offer you is a bare room and hot water. You pay two and a half roubles (five shillings and sixpence) for the use of the room. A pillow costs twenty kopecs, a rug twenty-five kopecs, a sheet twenty kopecs, a towel ten kopecs, each candle fifteen kopecs, water for washing ten kopecs, hot water for tea ten kopecs. The five shillings and sixpence entitles you to the use of a room, a table, a

chair, and a sofa, anything beyond this is extra—and stiffly extra. Happy Tomsk! May I never shed the lustre of my presence upon you again.

The day before I left, Mr. Nicolas Jackovlevitch Beloborodoff, one of the chief architects of the new Siberian railway, called upon me. Mr. Beloborodoff is a cyclist, is proud of being a Russian and not a Siberian, and was profoundly sorry at the miserable accommodation and reception which had been accorded me at the hands of those who had received from Moscow the notification of my coming and who had been asked to render me (in my ignorance of the Russian language) any slight assistance I might require. Mr. Beloborodoff took me at once to his own house, a pretty little villa on the outskirts of Tomsk, and here I was introduced to Madame Beloborodoff, who has

withered or not, to Irkutsk, as they would be sure to bring me luck, with all Russian fervour then bade me God-speed. Her husband accompanied me to the next post-house, where, after a sumptuous repast on eatables which had been brought along, I set out once more alone, heading for Krasnoiarsk, which marks the very centre of Siberia.

I found in my journey through Siberia that, while the length of my ride afforded some food for wonderment, those with whom I came in contact were the more astonished at my audacity in venturing into semi-barbaric Asiatic Russia without knowing the language. While there has been a certain sort of admiration for that audacity it has been plain to see that that admiration has been mingled with some degree of uncertainty as to my mental balance. The



Khirghiz Musicians.

the distinction of being the only lady cyclist in the province of Tomsk (a province by the way, which is considerably larger than the whole of France), and to several gentlemen connected with the construction of this monumental railway enterprise. They were really a bright few hours I spent, and did much to compensate me for my former uncomfortable position.

Early the next day I pulled out from Tomsk, Mr. and Madame Beloborodoff and Mr. Katsenn in company. The day was fearfully hot, the road extremely hilly and deep in dust. Madame Beloborodoff came as far as the first post-station, twenty-two versts, and after tying a bunch of roses to my handlebar abjuring me to carry them,

Russians are great travellers. Ten thousand versts in a troika is thought no more of than an Englishman's journey from London to Edinburgh, but the originality of my mode of locomotion, and my ignorance of the language all along, struck Russians as something bordering upon fool-hardiness. "Travelling under such circumstances it is impossible for you to reach Irkutsk," had be drummed into my ears all along the line, and, "I should never have thought it," is what I have heard when I have progressed yet another stage on the journey. It was plain to see that in my humble way I had added a little to that continental belief that as a nation of people the English are decidedly mad.

CHAPTER XIV.

THROUGH THE YENESEI MOUNTAINS.

I WAS now riding over a succession of mountain ranges amid the most glorious woodland scenery imaginable. The watershed of the Obi and Tom is distinguished by the wealth of its forests and its innumerable streams; a more fertile field for colonisation could not be conceived than this country which lies east of the great steppes. It was plain to see that the bounteous hand of nature had some effect upon the character and habits of the people in these mountain

ranges. Agriculture was evident on all hands; the villages were cleaner and brighter. The awful delapidation and melancholy which seemed to pervade the hamlets right from Ekaterinburg, to Tomsk now disappeared, and a more cheerful state of affairs began to grow up around me. I found amongst the people, too, a little less of that cringing servility which I have before remarked upon; there was a sort of independence and more dignified bearing which comes



Ashinsk.

from the knowledge of honest work honestly done. The people worked ; it was obvious that they were ambitious ; about their little homes there was some attempt at cleanliness and decoration. Tawdry as the latter might be, it showed the spirit was not wanting, and that the people were not content, like their western countrymen, to live on a plane but little removed from that of the beasts of the field. On this picture of improvement which grew fairer day by day, there seemed but one shadow, and that the shadow which has blackened more civilized countries than Siberia—Drink. The love of vodki is as great amongst the Siberians as amongst the Russians. Pious christian as he is, the Siberian worships two gods, and Bacchus is

far as Tomsk, ninety per cent of merchandise and the travelling public journey by rail and river, but from Tomsk the only communication with the east is by road, and thus I found the great highway pretty well frequented. Great caravans of tarantasses, sometimes a mile or two miles long, carrying tea from China, crept like enormous serpents over the mountains ; fast driven troikas, with some eastward or westward bound traveller passed me at short intervals. Things were more lively altogether, but were not without their shady side. The post stations were always crowded with travellers waiting for horses, and it became difficult for me to obtain accommodation in spite of the authoritative paper which entitled me to the use of



The first Station on the Siberian Railway.

not the least powerful. From my point of view, Sunday was always my worst riding day, because it was upon that day the very air of villages reeked with vodki ; from the headman to the poorest moujik, Sunday seemed a day of blatant, insensate carousal ; the streets of villages were bestrewed with the insensible vodki-besotted bodies of their inhabitants. The temperance reformers of England have an easy task before them compared to what they would have in Russia.

From Tomsk, the great high road began to show some signs of improvement. The surface was repaired with sand, bridges over streams were better, and altogether the outlook for my wheel and myself was brighter. The reason of this is easy of explanation. As

the post house. Sitting around, sipping one's tea in these post stations, it is interesting to listen to the continual jangle of conversation which is going on.

Here is a man, who, though the weather is baking, sports a rich fur coat. "You are going east?" asks a man in a white costume, and with a mosquito net hanging jauntily on his left ear. Yes ; to Pekin, and "you?" "Oh! straight to Paris on business. I am from Irkutsk." Here is a man from Vladivostock. Here are a man, woman, and child, making a modest repast off sardines, black bread, and vodki, apparently quite content with the prospect of their five thousand versts, journey behind post horses to Semipalatinsk, in Central Asia. Here is a trader from Yakutsk, bound for Meshed and Teheran, in

Persia. Here a Russian officer, armed with a crown padorojnal, travelling as fast as horses can gallop from the Mongolian frontier to St. Petersburg, swaggering and blustering about the room. One hears of travellers to all parts of Asia; the familiar names of Tobolsk, Yokohama, Bokara, Shanghai, Moscow, and Calcutta all mixed up in delightful confusion; meanwhile that sweating yemshiks bundle heaps of luggage, beds, and bedding, into the room, and outside a crowd of drivers and ostlers are harnessing or unharnessing the troika horses to the continual jangle of the head bells. A spirited scene this, but as the game goes on all night long, the while I am endeavouring to snatch a little sleep on a bench, its novelty and excitement becomes a little monotonous.

Favoured by good weather, I passed through Marinsk on the second day out from Tomsk. The hills now became terrific, many of them being four thousand feet above sea level. But what superb views from the crown of these hills—a rolling, tumbled country, north, south, east and west. Hill sides, deep green with common land, or bluff and brown where the sand stone lies arid; great masses of sombre pines and firs branching here and there in spurs from the main black forests, whose depths are trackless, and whose jungle is the home of the wolf and the bear. Now and again I got some

glorious coasts, and would go sailing down three thousand feet of road winding in and out of the forest until I reached some canon through which an imprisoned river roared and spurted its foaming way along; and then, like a ribbon, the road ahead would look, climbing over sharp spurs, winding in and out of the forest, mounting ever, ever, upward until its border of telegraph posts dwindled till they looked like a fencing of match sticks, and the road itself was like a pencil line on the mountain's horizon. What a sweat to climb that hill; the while that troikas would overtake me, and the yemshiks would fiercely crack their long whips and urge their horses to faster pace. "Jangle, jangle, jangle," would go the bells; to become subdued by the distance to a mere tinkle, and when the troika would look no more than a little black ant crawling slowly up the hill-side, amid a feathery cloud of dust.

Beyond being the unfortunate means of stampeding a few caravans with the accompanying consequence of a smashed tarantass or two, or having a wordy war with some drunken driver as to right of way, my progress was without any incident of out of the way importance, and on August the first I rolled into Ashinsk, two hundred versts from Krasnoiarsk.



CHAPTER XV.

THE CONVICT GANG.

AT the last post-station before reaching Ashinsk the post-master confided to me a piece of information which I mentally set down as the champion Siberian lie. It was to the effect that from Ashinsk to Irkutsk, a thousand miles, the road was a properly constructed *chausée*, or macadamised highway. Like the man "who don't believe nothink wot he don't see with his own eyes," I wouldn't credit it. A *chausée* in Siberia! One might as well expect a cement track in Timbuctoo! At mid-day I cleared out of the small and uninteresting town of Ashinsk, the post station of which was, if anything, worse than those in the villages, determined to make another fifty versts before turning in for the night. Once clear of the stockade which surrounded the town, I came in sight of two huge black and white posts, marking the division of the provinces of Yenesei and Tomsk. In another second I nearly fell off the machine with delight, for there, at the posts, commenced the *chausée* of which I had been told. I could scarcely credit my eyesight. I got off the machine and sat down to ponder, and to assure myself that the age of miracles was not yet passed. I am not ashamed to say that I did a modest imitation of the British hornpipe all to my own satisfaction. I smoked a couple of papiros furiously, and a moujik came along to beg a kopec for bread. I gave him twenty kopecs, and assured him that nothing would give me greater delight than that he should get beastly drunk with the money. The poor old fellow staggered away, crossing himself violently, and invoking all the blessings of providence for my benefit, but what did I want more? I'd got a *chausée*, my "Rover" was as sound in wind and steel as the day it left its Coventry workshop; spite

of my privations I was still in good health, and, in the fulness of my gladness, Irkutsk seemed no further away than a village round the corner.

I set off over that broad road in excellent spirits. The roadway was splendidly built, with a surface as good as that of the familiar London-Brighton turn-pike. The pedals seemed to fairly fly around after the heavy pushing through the deep dust and rubble of the landway, and I arrived at close of day at the little village of Kemrug, with the prospect of covering the 105 versts which separated me from Krasnoiarsk on the morrow. Near Kemrug, a traveller, westward bound, hailed me by name; had his horses turned round and came to the post station with me. He knew all about me, for the Tomsk papers had recently printed particulars of my journey, and he, a sportsman, now bound on a bear hunting expedition in the wild raspberry groves of the Yenesei forests, wanted particularly to have a glass of tea with me. True, our conversation was limited, as my supply of Russian only sufficed for generalities. But it was evident the traveller was deeply interested in my journey. He pressed upon me a couple of handfuls of papiros, and about a pound of Dutch cheese; was profoundly sorry that I wouldn't drink vodki, but delighted to hear I liked Russian tea. He showed me his guns, his knives, and his revolvers; he told me how they killed bears and wolves, and which from his description seemed a pretty dangerous pastime. We parted the best of friends, though it was a million chances to one we should never see each other again.

Next day, about half way between Kemrug and Krasnoiarsk, I paused for a moment on the brow of a hill to take in a supply of air

to replenish the exhaust of a long climb. I was now at the top of the last range, and it was all down hill to Krasnoiarsk. Below me, winding along the road, was a long caravan going eastward. I mounted, and coasted down the hill, rapidly overtaking the caravan, which, as I approached nearer and nearer, appeared quite different to other caravans which I had seen, inasmuch as it consisted of about six tarantasses loaded up with women and children, while ahead, four or five deep, marched a motly crowd of men, five hundred at least, closely guarded by white-jacketed, white-capped soldiers, whose bayonets sheened in the sunlight. As I overtook the caravan the monotonous "click-clack, click-clack," of chains, told me

tions, and the horrors are no horrors at all.

I wheeled up past the tarantasses on which were seated the women and children, wives and offspring of some of the convicts, and who, rather than desert husband or father, claim the right which the government allows of sharing his captivity. As I rode by, the soldiers closed in with cries of "Daroga! daroga!" ("Road, road!") and hustled the chained gang to one side. Most of the prisoners were dressed in the Russian convict costume, a grey holland knickerbocker suit, stockings, and a grey round skull cap. The chains they wore seemed heavy, being fastened by broad iron bands around the ankles, and carried up between the legs to an iron suspender from the belt. Each man



Leaving Krasnoiarsk.

that at last I had come across what I had longed to see. A caravan of convicts *en route* to the mines.

Who has not read of that dread caravan, winding its toilsome way over the dreary Siberian plains, and the snow clad mountains? Of convicts dropping and dying by the road side, of all the horrors which are supposed to be part and parcel of the convict system of despotic Russia? These horrors have been held up in a lurid light by several writers. Whether there have been gross exaggeration or not I cannot say, as it would be idiotic on my part to pose as an authority on Russian affairs from the mere superficial evidence afforded by my journeying over Russian territory. Russians say there *have* been gross exaggera-

carried a bundle and a kettle. Many of the men, however, were not clothed in the convict dress, and among these I noticed several Khirghiz, Circassians, and Turkomans in the picturesque cossack costume of Central Asia. Truly, they looked weary and woe begone, travel stained and dirty as they were, but, as I rode by, they greeted me with shrill cries, and many of them shouted with laughter, or called upon me to stop and to let them have the use of my bicycle. In another minute I was past them, the soldiers spread out again, swinging their rifles carelessly over their shoulders, and the caravan was soon hidden in the dust which rose from the tramping feet, but I could still hear the sound of the chains, and their dreadful clank was in my ears for an hour afterwards

when the caravan was many miles behind.

What glorious scenery it was as I rode down that valley towards Krasnoiarsk. Tall bluff hills, sharp spurs of red rock, and conical volcanic like formations clearly limned against the blue northern sky. To the south, rolling downs, mounting ever

upward. To the east and far away, the blue outline of high mountains, the crests of which were tipped with fleecy clouds ; while in the middle distance the road wound in and out of the valley, and presently, below me, bathed in the light of the westering sun, I saw the white city of Krasnoiarsk.

CHAPTER XVI.

KRASNOIARSK.

MY first impression of Krasnoiarsk was distinctly favourable ; just as my first impressions of Omsk and Tomsk had been the opposite. I saw immediately in Krasnoiarsk some game effort at method and order, while its picturesque, not to say superb, situation added to its charms. On the banks of the Yenesei, the mightiest of all the mighty-rivers in Siberia, and surrounded by hills, it occupies a position which is remarkable and unique. The streets are wide, macadamised, and the majority of the houses are of brick and stone. There is an absence of dust and evil smells, and in fact the whole place, before I had been five minutes in it, struck me as being brighter and more wholesome than any town I had been in since leaving Ekaterinburg — and Krasnoiarsk, bear in mind, is only a penal settlement. Seventy-five per cent of its large population being exiles or descendants of exiles.

I had a letter of introduction to the largest trader in the city, the firm of Gadoloff, and thanks to Mr. Gadoloff, I was speedily ensconced in a hotel, which, if not quite up to the European style, was far more comfortable than anything I had tumbled across in Siberia so far. Wonders were never to cease, for I had barely removed the outer traces of my travel when there came a knock at my door, and the next moment I was speaking with a real live Englishman, Mr. Harry Lister, the representative of the big English com-

pany which was responsible for the enterprising voyages of Captain Wiggins through the Kara sea and down the Yenesei river. As the first Englishman I had met in Siberia, it was naturally a joyful meeting, and I accepted with alacrity the invitation to dinner which was extended me. Surprises did not end here, for in Mr. Lister's house I was introduced to Mr. Thomas G. Allen, the American wheelman, who six years ago in company with Mr. Sachtleben wheeled around the world. Mr. Allen was on business and pleasure bent in Siberia, and confessed with sorrow that since his memorable journey around the globe he had almost forsaken the cycle.

Plumb in the middle of Siberia, the last place that one would expect such a thing to happen, here was I hob-nobbing with a couple of fellow-countrymen — for the brotherhood of a common language makes every American an Englishman in English eyes, and Mr. Allen, proud of the star-spangled banner as he was, was to me every bit as good a fellow-countryman as if he had never gazed on any flag during his life but the Union Jack. The young American had many reminiscences of his famous wheel-ride to recount, and I in my turn had to tell of the difficulties which had beset the first man to ride a bicycle across Siberia. A pleasant dinner, a delightful conversational evening which lasted well into the small

hours, and which sent me to bed in a far more pleasant frame of mind than I had experienced for many week's past. For over two months I had not spoken my own language, so that the reader will readily appreciate how happily to me that meeting went.

I have already alluded to the fact that Krasnoiarsk is a penal settlement, and here it may be advisable to endeavour to explain away that tremendous misconception of the Russian convict law which exists in England. At home, the mention of Siberia at once suggests the chained convict gangs and the salt and lead mines. In the first place it is only the hardened criminal that goes to the mines. The political offender or the offender who is not convicted for

leave Siberia unless pardoned by the Emperor. Mr. Lister's coachman is a convict; his maid servants are descendants of convicts. Five men out of six which you meet in the street are probably convicts. There is absolutely no odium attached to the fact of being an exile, and it is freely acknowledged that the exiles have done far more to civilize Siberia than have the native inhabitants. This is not to be wondered at when it should go without saying that the political offender must in the first place have been a man of mental ability; while the enormous number of erudite Poles who were banished after the insurrection of '63, have been the means of giving to darkest Siberia the light of intelligence, education, and culture.

In the case of the Russian convicted of a



Crossing the Yenesei.

actual murder or attempted murder is simply banished to Siberia, with no hope of ever returning to his native country. He is under the eye of the police, naturally, but beyond this he is not interfered with in the slightest way. He can enter business or pursue the avocation he followed before his becoming exiled, and is even assisted by the government in his laudable endeavours to become independent. Some of the richest traders and dealers in Krasnoiarsk and Irkutsk are convicts, or in another word, exiles. Many are millionaires, their fortune's made since they were banished from their own country. Every exile enjoys the rights and privileges accorded to the unexiled portion of the community, with only this bar—that he can never

petty criminal offence, his compulsory journey to Siberia should have rather pleasing results than otherwise. The penniless moujik of Russia, having committed some crime, goes out with the chained gang, and on reaching his destination, the government endeavours to provide him with honest work. He is given a piece of land and a house, and is free to make it a financial success. If he is a workman of any sort, say a shoemaker, a tailor, or follows any branch of trade for which he has an aptitude, endeavours are made to provide him with employment. I have been told on good authority, the authority of an officer connected with the convict department, that, if anything, the exile is far better off than the native Siberian,

and an extraordinary illustration of this is the story of a Krasnoiarsk man, a native Siberian, who found that it payed far better to be a convict than a free man. He purposely went to Russia, committed a felony, and was sent to Siberia with the chained gang, and is now a prosperous trader. More likely than not, the bond of sympathy which will naturally bind exiles together, has something to do with this state of things. At any rate, for a Penal settlement, Krasnoiarsk is a bright and apparently happy town, and for sheer comfort, is miles ahead of the other Siberian cities through which I passed.

There are some fifteen to twenty cyclists in Krasnoiarsk, but the great art of wheeling is as yet in a primitive state, though the good roads in the vicinity is an encouraging element in its favour. Though there is no properly constituted club, the cyclists are pretty much of a brotherhood, and

on the second day of my stay appeared *en bloc* at my hotel to assure me that they were pleased to know I had got thus far on my journey, and asking the *favour* of being allowed to accompany me some little way on the day I left. Untutored in the ways of wheeling life, these good hearted fellows *asked permission* to accompany me, a request so original to me that I was filled with astonishment. My plans were to leave on the morning of August 8th, and punctual to time, on that day, amid a noisy jingling of bells and tootling of horns, the cycle cavalcade, with myself in its midst, swept proudly down Krasnoiarsk's main street, through the outskirts and over the smooth road by the side of the broad blue Yenesei, and headed then eastward, towards the mountains which loomed sombre and magnificent right in my path to the goal of my ride.



CHAPTER XVII.

OVER THE MOUNTAINS TO KANSK.

THE river Yenesei, which washes the base of Krasnoiarsk, is one of the most magnificent streams I have ever seen. Its eastern shores rise almost perpendicularly into imposing mountains, fir clad, or bare and red showing the rocky and volcanic formation caused by some upheaval in this portion of the world in the ages now dead. One of the hardest things to realise was that this was Siberia. Here was I in a country which rivalled Switzerland in its mountain loneliness, and the Balkan countries for the savagry of its aspect.

Scenery, I believe, has much to do with the character of the people. I have before remarked on the melancholy aspect of the inhabitants of the steppe provinces, and yet here, in these mountain wilds, the people seemed much happier, much brighter, more intelligent. Nature is an inspiration, an education, and the more beautiful she appears so is mankind the richer in mind.

The ferry boat which bore me across the Yenesei was the largest and most gaily decorated one I had yet been on. The power employed in impelling the boat across stream was also different to that which I had seen used on the rivers more westward. Up stream, at least half a mile away, was an anchored boat; from this a long cable extended to a sliding bar on the top of the ferry, but between the ferry boat and the one at anchor were a dozen smaller craft all fastened to the line from a pole in the centre of each boat. The stream, which comes down at a tremendous pace at this point, acts on these boats which are always pulling at the anchored vessel, and thus the heaviest one of the string—the ferry boat itself, sweeps across the river at a tremendous pace carried along by the current, and after making a curve arrives at the other side.

Having crossed the river, the roadway runs for some distance at the base of those picturesque mountains which I have already mentioned, and parallel with the workings of the new Siberian Railway. Krasnoiarsk was soon out of sight, and at ten miles the road made a turn to the northward through a deep gorge, the sides of which went up almost perpendicularly for some thousands of feet, and along whose base rushed a turbulent river which was noisily making its way to the ever absorbent Yenesei, where to be swallowed and lost. At the first station, a little hamlet of black huts, my Krasnoiarsk companions left me, and I pushed on alone once more.

For many miles the road was steadily uphill, although here and there there were some terrific slopes to negotiate, but fortunately the surface of the highway was excellent. Caravans without number I passed on the way, toiling slowly over the slopes towards their far-off destinations. Again and again, did some spirited horse take exception to my bicycle, and infuse into itself a vigour which must have astonished its driver. Again and again, was I the unfortunate cause of many a smashed vehicle; of many an upset which scattered merchandise of all descriptions in the road. The yemshiks' cursed me with a sincerity which came from their very hearts, but I was becoming callous to their curses from long usage, and because, much as I regret the accidents which I caused, it was patent to me that the drivers brought much of their grief upon themselves, since, to a man they were sleeping when I overtook them, allowing their equine servants to pick their way along the road without control whatever.

At the village of Procrashensk, where I stayed for the night, an interesting sight was

brought to my notice, nothing less in fact than a gold caravan on its way from the mines to the government laboratory in Tomsk. It should be remarked here that all the gold found in Siberia is handed over to the government, which receives it and credits the miner with its net value, less five per cent which the government retains for turning the gold into currency. The caravan at Procrashensk consisted of five tarantasses under the charge of a Chinovnik, or government servant, and upon whom rested the

for the officials would share no expense to hunt the robber down.

Next day, in beautiful but very hot weather, I continued my ride over the mountain roads, the scenery, if anything, becoming more beautiful as I progressed further eastward. At mid-day I seemed to have reached the top of the range, for the afternoon was spent in gentle coasts and declines towards the town of Kansk, and just before sundown I arrived at the brow of a hill, and before me was spread one of the most lovely panoramas



A picturesque bit on the road to Kansk.

responsibility of delivering it safely to the receivers at Tomsk. With him were four mounted cossacks, an escort which struck me as being rather small for so valuable a freight. I entered into conversation with the Chinovnik, a most affable fellow for a Russian official, and who laughed at the idea of the caravan being attacked and robbed. The government is most scrupulous regarding the delivery of gold; every bit taken from the miner is checked, and Heaven help the man who tries to steal it,

I have ever had the fortune to gaze upon.

A plain, absolutely bare and like the pit of a circus, with precipitous mountains all around, and in the middle the important town of Kansk all white and glittering in the sunlight. Below me, the road wound in and out of rocky promontories and over ledges which seemed to hang on the very face of the cliff, while across the plain itself the highway stretched like a long sinuous snake until it dwindled to nothingness. I could not help pausing a moment here to

admire the beauty of the scene, but not too long, for I was anxious to reach the town before the sun actually set. It was while seated on a rock that a ragged and shoeless moujik crept out of the bushes at the roadside, and, almost prostrating himself before me, begged a kopec for bread. I gave him some money, and it was touching to see the poor old man's gratitude, accustomed as he had been, no doubt, to many a stern refusal. Whether his blessings to me were sincere or not it is not for me to judge, but I think they were, and I left him with that little

at me with gusto, and brandishing his knout like a madman. Things looked a bit too troubled for me to return to the scene of the disaster, so I gently slid on to my bicycle again, and in half-an-hour was safely ensconced in the *Zemski Quartier* in Kansk.

Strange are the experiences of the bicyclist. All in two minutes, I had one Russian blessing me and another one cursing me. Maybe the blessings and the curses balanced matters, and evened things up until they were much as they were before.

The confession which I have already made

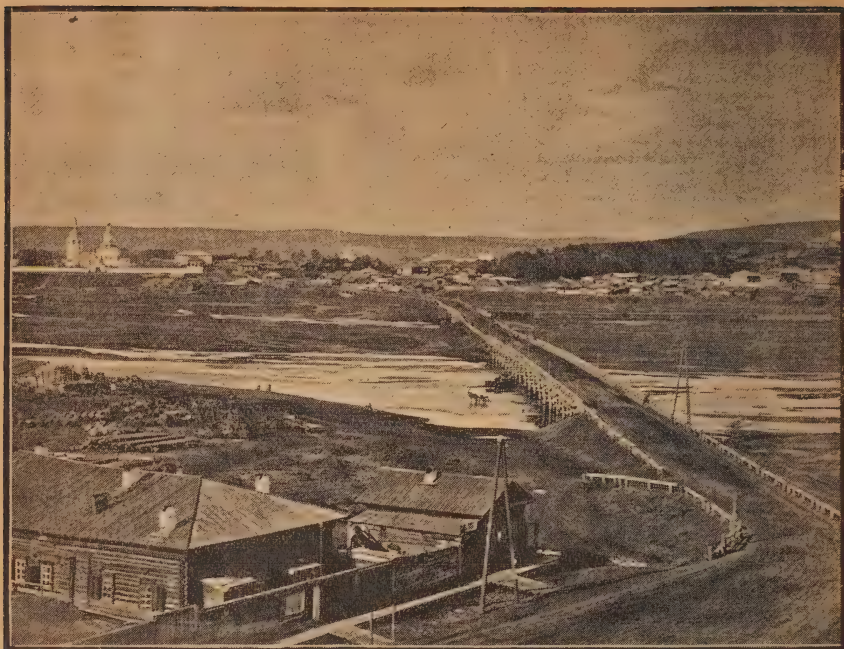


A convict guard.

feeling of pleasure that I had at least made someone happy in this vast Siberia.

A minute later I was coasting rapidly down the hill, and rounding a bend in the road almost ran into a troika which was toiling upwards. Before one could say "Jack Robinson," the horses had slewed right round, and over went the tarantass with a crash, spilling driver, boxes, bales, and a fierce-looking Russian officer all higgledy, piggledy, into the road. By the merest good luck, I managed to scrape by the wreck, crumming on the brake the while. I dismounted a hundred yards further on; the driver had scrambled to his feet and was howling curses

concerning the indifference with which I regarded these accidents may seem to the reader hardly the right thing to do under the circumstances. I suppose in common humanity and fairness I ought, after being the cause of a big smash, to return and render what help I could to the overturned *telega* or *tarantass*. In my own defence I must say, however, that my experience of the Russian was such that an act of this character was never viewed with any sort of gratitude; on the contrary, my proffered help had invariably been met with storms of abuse and sometimes attempts at violence, the latter generally being directed against



Approach to Irkutsk.

my bicycle, for the Russian nature is such that if one's method of locomotion has been destroyed the *quid pro quo* was to destroy that of the other's. I was always fearful of my bicycle, for I was now in a part of the country where, if my machine was broken, there would be nothing for it but to abandon

the ride. A repair, or a new bicycle, would be an utter impossibility. My jealousy for my machine, therefore, must be some excuse for the seeming callousness which I displayed towards those travellers on the road who suffered by my coming amongst them.



CHAPTER XVIII.

MOSQUITOE VALLEY.

BEAUTIFUL as Kansk looked from the brow of the hill its beauty was only superficial, for I found it much the same as the other Siberian small towns which I have already described. The same miserable accommodation, and the same difficulty in obtaining food. I left it early on the following morning, and commenced the ascent of the formidable mountain pass which was to take me a stage further towards my destination. Soon after mid-day I entered the fringe of the forest which stretches away for nearly six hundred miles through the Yeneseik and Irkutsk provinces. Next to the trackless forests which lie between Lake Baikal and the Pacific Coast, the wood which I was now passing through is the largest in Siberia. It is full of wild raspberry groves and in the winter months is alive with bears and wolves, forming the happy hunting ground of many a Jager from Irkutsk, Krasnoiarsk, and other large centres. Bears and wolves, however, do not stir from their fastnesses in the jungle during the hot summer days; there is plenty of food for them in the game which nature has so plentifully provided, and it is only when famished and frantic, their usual supply of food cut off by the terrible snow, that they rush to their death on the guns of the hunters.

But in summer, though there is nothing to fear from such big game as bears and wolves, there is a terror which all travellers who have passed through this forest know only too well, and that is from the myraids of mosquitoes and flies which fairly impregnate the atmosphere from one end of the forest land to the other. There are some people who may be prone to laugh at my calling mosquitoes a terror, but a terror they

were to me, and are to the inhabitants of the Yeneseik woods. I have it on good authority that although the moujiks, who work or live in this part of Siberia, wear nets and even sacks over their heads they are frequently so fearfully stung that they perish. Horses without number go mad and plunge into ponds and rivers in order to allay the pain of the stings, and in doing so drown themselves. Altogether life does not seem worth living when one has to go around enveloped in a sack in order to keep at bay these dreaded insects.

The moujiks have several ingenious methods of keeping the enemy at bay. Workers in the woods have attached to their belts a small iron vessel filled with tar, in which a stick is kept burning; the smoke and fumes of the tar surround the body, and as these fumes are deadly to the mosquito he keeps at a respectful distance, but generally hangs around with a loose eye open for a chance when the burning stick shall go out, or the wind blow the smoke on one side; then down he comes with a swoop, in goes his sting, and, though he is surely killed for his trouble, he has effected his purpose, and no doubt dies happily. Cattle are, perhaps, the worse sufferers, and the peasants, in order to protect their poor beasts from this infernal torture, have recourse to a device which is at once simple and effective. They build a crescent of pine logs in a grass clearing, with the bow of the crescent pointed in the direction of the wind. The logs are then fired and the cattle driven into the centre of the crescent, where they patiently stand, amid a halo of smoke, but happy in being free from their tormentors.

During the three days that I was passing through this forest, I suffered considerably

from mosquitoë bites. I wore my black tarred net day and night, for even in the post stations the mosquitoë came in the dead of the night, and would leave a memento of his visit if he got a chance. While asleep one night my left arm somehow got uncovered, and in the morning I discovered it red and discoloured, and nearly its double size with stings. The pain was excruciating, not merely a smarting of the skin, but a pain which seemed to go right to the bone. For over a day I had no power in my left arm to hold the handlebar.

For three days I rode through this dense wood. Great gaunt pines rising up out of the earth in their millions. There was

fifty or more enormous dogs, the usual escort I had in most villages through which I passed. The canine assailants in this particular hamlet were perhaps more ferocious than any which had come for me before, for invariably I had found that a shot or two fired over their heads was sufficient to scare them away. In this case, however, matters went differently. The whole gang closed in around me, creating the most infernal din imaginable, and before I quite knew what had happened I was brought over with a crash. So thoroughly incensed was I at falling, and at a crowd of laughing moujiks who were enjoying the fun, that my temper got the better of my discretion,



A street in Irkutsk.

something inexpressibly melancholy about these quiet and sombre trees. The knowledge of their multitude, and of the trackless jungle they formed for thousands of miles north and south of this white highway which had penetrated their depths. How puny man's effort seemed, compared with nature's work over that immense track of country. The very trees, so still and majestic, seemed to look down upon me with a disdain, as if I were only some poor worm crawling over the face of the earth.

An unpleasant incident occurred in a small village about a hundred versts west of Nijni Udinsk. Immediately on entering the village, I was at once surrounded by

and singling out the brute which had caused my tumble, I promptly and without hesitation blew his brains out, and then emptied the remaining barrels of my revolver in rapid succession over the heads of the rest.

Having accomplished this feat to my entire satisfaction, I remounted, and sped down the hill to the post house, where I intended to partake of some refreshment. Hardly however, had I got my jug of milk before me, when I was swarmed by a motley crowd of peasants all talking at once, with one of them in the centre, dragging the carcase of the dog which I had just shot. It was clear to me that there was going to be trouble, so I got through my milk at a gulp,

and put a few kopecs on the table by way of payment. The man with the dog then opened out, and in most vigorous language demanded to know what I intended to do. I replied as coolly as circumstances would allow, seeing that the crowd was a most threatening one, that I didn't intend to do anything, and at that moment in came the post-master to see what all the racket was about.

With everybody speaking at once, and the crowd pressing closer and closer, I confess I began to feel a little alarmed at the outlook, but knowing that with a moujik to hesitate

of Russian officers, whose acquaintance I had made at a previous station. At once the balance of favour went on my side. It needed no blows on the part of the officers to effect this, the fact that I had acquaintance with them was sufficient, the peasants slunk away, and I was safe.

"Get off now, sir," said one of the officers, "as quickly as you can. Wait for us at the next station and tell us all about it."

I needed no second bidding but mounted and sped down the hill, my pace accelerated a bit by a huge stone which I received in the middle of my back as a parting memento



Outside the prison of Irkutsk.

was to lose, I got up and pushed my way roughly through them to where my bicycle stood against the wall. My determination was to get out into the road and make a bolt for it, but in this I was frustrated, for on the doorstep the crowd came on me in a body, and laid hands on the machine. What happened next I am not quite clear about, but I know there was a bit of a struggle, and a good deal of swearing going on in both Russian and English. I found myself on the ground with the bicycle half on top of me, and two or three of the crowd trying to hold me down. At this critical moment up galloped a troika and out jumped a couple

from one of the disappointed moujiks.

At the next station I waited for my officer friends, and they laughed heartily at the episode. "But be careful when you go back," said one of them, "For they mean to wait for you, and perhaps we shan't be there to help you out."

My meeting with the officers was no doubt a most opportune one, for there is no knowing how serious might have been the consequences of the incident just related. Single handed I could have done nothing against a mob of infuriated villagers, although I have no doubt that with my revolver I might have been able to defend myself in a

better manner, but such an act as this would, of course, have to be the very last resource, and only when there was actual danger of my losing my life. Although no traveller would dream of going across Asia unarmed, the revolver is, after all, a dangerous weapon to put into the hands of an over hasty man, and it was the restraint I always put upon myself in this connection to which I ascribe much of my success in wheeling across Siberia. Matters had been pretty serious in several instances, but never serious enough to warrant the pulling of a trigger against a fellow man, and I feel confident, after my

little journeys in the Orient, and in Northern Asia, that had I ever been indiscreet enough to draw upon my human assailants, such an act would have been but the signal for my own destruction. I say this, because I have read much of the lone Englishman and his little revolver keeping whole crowds of "fanatics" at bay—in countries, too, where life is as cheap as dirt, and where the "fanatics" are generally armed to the teeth. The murder of the American bicyclist, F. G. Lenz, in Turkey, is eloquent proof of how little avail are one man's strength, and one man's pistol against odds.



The Cathedral, Irkutsk.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE END AT LAST.

AT four o'clock next day I crossed the small but rapidly flowing river Udinsk and rode into Nijni Udinsk, the last town before reaching Irkutsk, and only 315 versts from the destination of my ride. I have refrained in the previous chapter or two from wearying the reader with a repetition of my difficulties in obtaining food, but all the way from Krasnoiarsk I had suffered severely in this respect. At Nijni Udinsk I expected to obtain at least bread and eggs, and at the

there was none in the house. I wandered out into the town intent on getting something to eat, but the town was dead asleep, and, after vainly knocking at the windows of one or two huts, I returned to the *Zemski*, thoroughly dispirited and disgusted, and laid down to sleep once more.

When I awoke in the early morning it was to find myself so weak and ill that I could not move. A burning fever consumed me, and my head seemed ready to burst.



The only Cycle Agency in Irkutsk.

Zemski quartier where I put up I asked the slatternly woman in charge to bring me some food regardless of expense. Whether she misunderstood me or not I do not know, but it was while waiting for the food I fell asleep on the bench and did not wake until dark.

I was famished, and immediately went out to search for eatables. The woman was asleep, but I woke her, and demanded food, even if it were only black bread, but she assured me

I tried to scramble off the bench, but only succeeded in falling in a heap on the floor, and my efforts to get back were futile. It became clear to me then that I was seriously bad, and what I had dreaded all along, fever, had got its work in. I was alone in the room, and although I shouted and knocked on the floor no notice was taken of me, or perhaps the noise I made was not heard. I am not certain how long I lay in that dreadful condition, but it must have

another class, composed of the functionaries, who hold aloof from the merchants and form amongst themselves a clique, which the other side not only respect but ignore. The functionaries, considering their enormous responsibilities, are but poorly paid, whereas the merchants, who trade on the large profits and quick returns principle, are apparently, as a body, enormously rich. Life is very dear in Irkutsk; in fact, taking any phase of it, it is more than doubly as expensive as London. Luxuries are at an almost prohibitive price, but, as money is so plentiful, there is a ready sale for all the most expensive European articles that ingenious traders can manage to bring to this out-of-the-world place.

I was considerably astonished during my three weeks' stay to notice, in some of the houses of the wealthy Siberians, articles of furniture and ornamentation that one would not expect to find outside Europe. True, the most ostentatious display was made of such things; but what I missed more than anything was the cosiness of the English or German home. This lavish display of wealth is done without taste, and in entire ignorance of the art of arrangement, so that some of the effects produced, to say the least were ludicrous. There is a certain spirit of rivalry amongst the Irkutsk traders in order to decorate their homes in the most expensive manner; a poor spirit it seemed to me, for it was as hollow as an eggshell, the sanitary arrangements of these same houses being absolutely revolting.

The main street of Irkutsk runs parallel with the River Angara, and here are situated some of the finest magazines as well as the new theatre, which has just been completed. Between the main street and the river is the big square, where the Governor-General's house and the cathedral are situated. As in all the Russian towns through which I passed, the ecclesiastical edifices were the finest buildings in Irkutsk, and the cathedral itself is a really handsome structure. Although I am not great on churches, I must admit that without them there is no city, town, or village in Russia but

what would be an uninteresting place.

Off the main street is the Chinese quarter, and here it was my delight to wander. This quarter is really a little bit of China all to itself; houses, inhabitants, shops, and articles sold, all smacking strongly of the Celestial Empire. In my peregrinations in the Chinese quarter I bought many articles as souvenirs, and formed the acquaintance of a Chinese doctor, who cured me of toothache and invited me to dine with him, an offer which I gladly accepted for the very novelty of it. I don't exactly know what I ate at this particular dinner; I only know it became a serious business to handle accurately the chop-sticks with which I was supplied. The Chinese seem a happy race and, though pre-disposed to bargain, were always open to reason. The Russians despise them; but, as a matter of fact, the Chinese are amongst the most skilful of small traders in Irkutsk.

Strolling through the streets it is surprising to note the extraordinary variety of races with which one comes in contact. The Buriats, who profess the Shamist (or sun-worship) faith, are to be met with in great numbers. They are the original inhabitants of the great country surrounding Lake Baikal, and to this day retain their native costume, religion, and language. Since the Russians came, however, and controlled them they have settled down as hunters for big game, and much of the supply of costly fur which finds sale in European markets has been



Buriat headmen.



Lisvisnicia, on Lake Baikal.

brought about by the gun of the hardy Buriat. Then one meets Mongols, from the desert of Gobi; Tungoos, from the East Siberian forests; Coreans and Manchurians. Most of the traders employ Circassian exiles as night watchmen, and these, in their picturesque Circassian costume, rub shoulders with the skin-clad Muscovite moujiks, the Khirghiz, who have been allowed by the Government to leave their native steppes, and with the Poles, who form a large percentage of the population.

To visit Irkutsk and not to see the famous Lake Baikal is to miss Siberia's greatest sight—next to the steppes. The inland sea, as the Siberians call it, Lake Baikal, lies some sixty versts, or forty miles, east of Irkutsk. It is encircled by precipitous mountains and receives some thousands streams, but there is only one outlet, a narrow gorge which forms the source of the River Angara, and through this, at a tremendous pace, the water rushes. As the highest fresh water lake in the world, the Siberians hold it in great veneration. According to tradition this enormous lake, or rather sea, was once the crater of a volcano and the main road to Hell, but the Sun-god in his might quenched the fire with the waters of

the sky, in order that Siberia should be supplied with water. The Buriats, who inhabit the Baikal region, believe that the lake supplies the whole of Siberia with water, and urge many reasons for this conclusion. One peculiar fact in connection with it is, that its bottom cannot be sounded and that its water is so cold that no fish can live in it.

I made the trip to Lisvisnicia, a small town on the shore of the Baikal, by steamer. It took me twenty-four hours to get there, such was the force of the current, while, as a matter of comparison, the steamer came back, three days later, in four hours. I explored, in the limited time at my disposal, a good deal of the country between the southern shore of the lake and the Chinese frontier, penetrating one day right to the border, in order to gaze for the first time upon Chinese territory. During these three days I came across many curious and interesting sights, not the least of which were the villages and temples of the Buriats and their grotesque images of worship.

But the time came near for me to bid farewell to Siberia's capital. The weather was already getting cold, and I was anxious to get back to old England. My three

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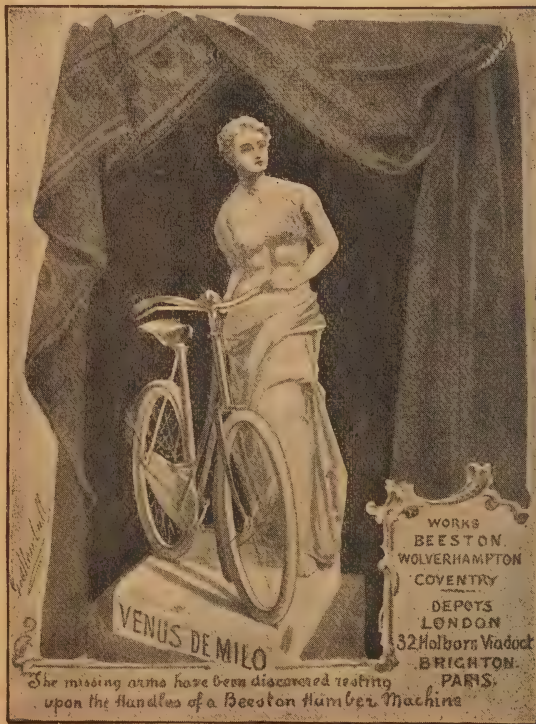
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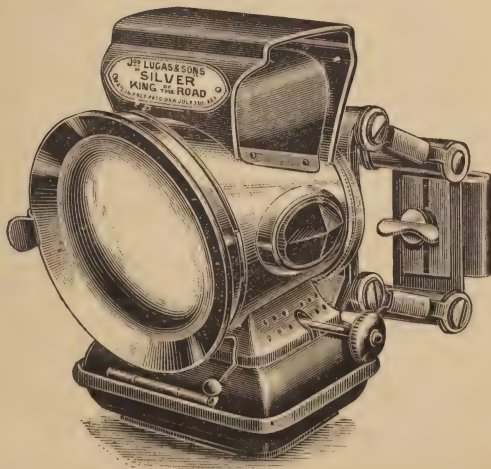


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